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A Novel

BY

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*IN THREE VOLUMES*

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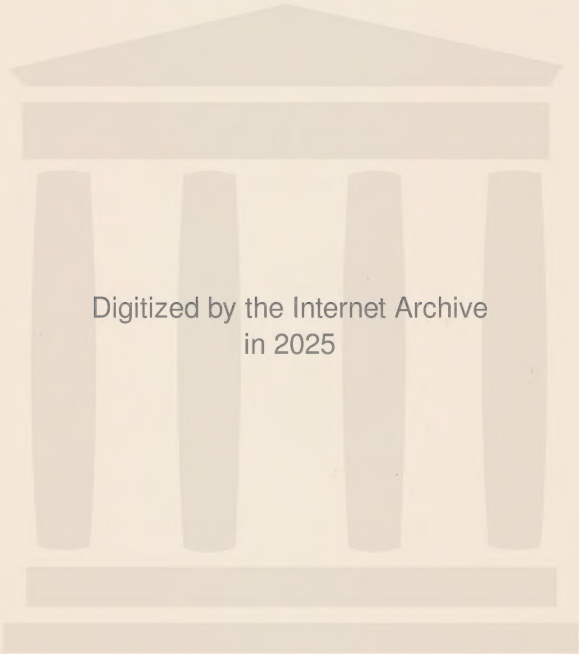
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# IN A PROMISED LAND.

## CHAPTER XIV

TOWARDS evening, some three or four days after the bazaar meeting, Jesse Runciman was walking homewards across the veld. As he walked along — his head slightly thrown back, his step quick and decided, his whole bearing a trifle too superior, too aggressive—he was as little like the man who, in fear and trembling, and bitterness of conscience, had left Beulah a few short weeks ago, and as much like the self-confident, somewhat dictatorial Jesse Runci-

man of the old days as his worst enemy could have desired.

His inner history, since his departure, had been much what might have been expected. All too soon he had begun to breathe that atmosphere of subtle flattery which had been the bane of his whole life, ever since a sensational (though, to his own consciousness, agonizingly genuine) "conversion" at the age of fourteen had made him an object of exulting interest to the whole of the Cape branch of the Primitive Gospellers.

Not but what he got plenty of exhortation; but he must have been really stupid not to feel that it was to his superiors' sense of duty he owed it, not to their fears. It did him more harm than good: it was so easy to accept, humbly and gratefully, warnings and exhortations which were all entirely wide of the mark, so

far as his real faults and dangers were concerned.

By the end of three weeks of this treatment, all sense of any special individual unfitness had been lost, swallowed up in an ocean of generalities. Of such general unworthiness, indeed, he had a terrific sense enough; to set himself too low a standard was never one of his failings. He passed his last night in Cape Town—the night which closed the Sunday of his public recognition—in one of his worst fits of nervous horror. It was but an abstract, nightmare agony, unfortunately; that piercing pang of self-revealing light, which had brought him at once so much keener, and so much more healthful suffering, was not to be so easily granted to him again. Such as it was, however, it had, at least, had the effect of making him desperately watchful over himself, in every way, for the first

days of his new start. But his very success seemed doomed to injure him; already he would have been prepared to marvel at his own old fears.

Nothing was less present to his mind, this evening, than doubts or fears of any kind. He felt curiously excited, elated: a little *fey*, perhaps? Long months afterwards he remembered that strange, causeless mood of exaltation.

Presently he stopped in his walk and looked about him. It was a desolate sort of prospect, and Runciman stood, perhaps, at its dreariest point. He stood in the midst of a deserted kraal. The dozen or so of round mud huts, like so many ant-hills, which were dotted about in twos and threes, showed no sign of life; a lean outcast of a dog went prowling and sniffing about among the heaps of refuse which had accumulated there; only a few scraggy sheep,

in a distant hollow, cropped the unsucculent vegetation with a despondent crunch.

There was nothing particularly romantic in the circumstances of the desertion; the huts had been vacated at the time when a very judicious enactment obliged the native labourers to live in the compounds. Yet no abstract knowledge of this fact could quite do away with a certain unique impressiveness about this dead hamlet, lit up by the last strong splendours of dying day; this little bit of Debatable Ground between civilization and barbarism, abandoned, here in the waste, by both.

Through the centre of the kraal an old half-obliterated cart-track led away into the sunset; the sides of the heavy ruts were falling in, and the dull-coloured sapless spikes of the vegetation of the Karroo had grown over them here and there, blotting them out. And beyond, and all around,

stretched the open veld, as far as the eye could reach, an undulating monotony, the little koppies standing up here and there like tumuli ; all colour and all shadow, vivid and metallic, under the molten gold of the sinking sun ; the light striking like something solid upon veld and kraal.

Away on the left, the faint, palpitating blueness of the southward sky was broken and barred by the skeleton lines of cranes and pulleys, marking the position of one of the mines. They stood out black, and clear and gaunt ; there was a certain grimness of suggestion about those interlacing, complicated silhouettes of bars and chains and wheels.

Runciman stood and looked across the desert solitude into the blinding glories of the west ; and as he looked, right between him and the sunset, there rose, above the summit of one of the mounds, the gigantic

figure of a man. The figure stood a moment—a statue of dark bronze, discernible only in mass, against the golden background of the sky; imposing in a degree, not by beauty of form or attitude, but by a certain rough-hewn massiveness, a Cyclopean breadth of effect.

"A giant among men," Runciman muttered to himself instinctively; and with the sound of his own words, his eyes were opened, and he started a step forward, with a scarcely suppressed cry.

Then he stopped. He stood watching the adversary come on, with that easy, rather indolent, stride of his hours of relaxation; to Runciman, his very gait looked like a defiance. He breathed more quickly; the excitement which had strung his nerves and quickened his pulses all the afternoon had, then, received an explanation. This was his hour: the veld was an arena; the

heavens were full of eyes—not so much eyes of watchers solicitous as exultant; conflict there might be, indeed, but conflict of which the result was a foregone conclusion.

Nearer and nearer; the long black shadow that preceded him, staining the glowing spaces of the veld with a moving blot, touched Jesse's feet. With an instinctive movement the young minister raised his foot and trampled on the advancing darkness. The next moment, he had moved a little to one side, setting himself right across Westoby's path.

"Wait," he said. He put up one hand, with the old schoolmaster gesture of command; his tone confessed not to the recognition of any possibility of disobedience. "Wait; I have a word to speak with you."

It seemed, for a scarcely perceptible instant, that Westoby hesitated—was about

to pass on. Then apparently he changed his mind. He stopped, as requested; but not with the manner of one who intends discussion.

"Well," he said, rather grimly, "I don't happen to have anything to say to you; and if you know when you're in luck's way, you'll thank your stars for that same. I've not forgotten you, don't you be afraid; and I did vow once you should remember me the longest day you lived. But I'm willing to let you off this time. I've got other fish to fry than to be bothering after a piece of cheek eighteen months old. Hold your jaw, then; go your way, and look to it that it don't cross mine, and I'll keep out of yours. That's spoken fair, and it ain't going to be spoken twice."

"Keep your forgiveness for those who are afraid of your threats," said Runciman, with his head high. "I value neither.

Peace! When such as you begin to speak of peace, it is time for the Lord's servant to make him ready to battle."

Westoby looked at him with a sort of amusement.

"You young idiot," he exclaimed, impatiently, but quite without violence. "What will you run your head against a wall for? Haven't I told you I don't want to get up a row? Don't be a fool; take my advice and let well alone;" then, as the other made a gesture of scornful interruption, "let ill alone, then; just as you like to put it. See here! I know well enough you think I'm the devil, or not far off. Then don't you rile me into taking the whip-hand of you; you mightn't care for the road I'd be taking you, and yet 'needs must,' you know, 'when the devil drives.'"

"So his servants say," said Runciman, rather contemptuously. "I am in other

service, in other keeping. I am myself but a weak believer, an unprofitable servant, even as a man that hath no strength." (His tone by no means bore out the humility of his words.) "But *I* have never found it so," he concluded, with really amazing oblivion.

"Haven't you?" said Westoby, coolly. "Then I'm thinking that's because he's never yet held the ribbons. I'd advise you never to give him the chance."

It was noticeable about this man that, with all his personal defiance of every spiritual power, with all his audacity and profanity, he yet never spoke exactly as an unbeliever; in fact, he was not one. The man of action seldom is; the ruler born, perhaps never; and Westoby was both.

He nodded easily as he spoke, and was passing on. Once more Runciman barred his path.

"Listen to me," he said; and there was an urgent imperiousness in his tone which could not but arrest attention to some extent. "It will be better for you in the end; better to have it spoken now in the ear than to have it proclaimed upon the house-tops. There is no other choice. Because speak I will. Months ago this message was given me for you, and woe unto me if I proclaim it not! If you won't hear, others shall; and that speedily."

This time Westoby did swear fiercely.

"I know no more what you mean than I reckon you do yourself," he exclaimed. "But if you will have it, take your own way! No chap that wanted to hang himself ever had to complain *I* didn't give him rope enough. Here I am, then!" He threw himself down on the dry earth, in the midst of the forlorn kraal, leaning his back against one of the deserted huts. There was less

carelessness in the move than there appeared to be. "Now out with your —message!" he said; "and cut it as short as you can, you were best."

"It is short," said Runciman, "short enough."

He paused; and what emotions, what anticipations filled up that pause, he himself could not have told. Only, when he did speak, his voice, his manner, had a certain solemnity which, considering the tremendous nature of what he was saying, was, at least, more becoming than the sort of "triumphant insultation" which had marked both voice and manner hitherto.

"Thus came the word of the Lord unto me, for thee," he said: "'Behold, thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground.'"

The movement with which Westoby drew himself into an attitude of greater

attention, was too deliberate to be accused as startled.

"If that's meant for a joke," he said, slowly, "it's a kind I don't particularly care for. If it isn't, I don't know what you mean."

And, in fact, his denouncer was so young, had, he knew, led a life so circumscribed, that Westoby really did doubt whether he was not trying to make a sensation by some strong figure of speech.

"He that was a murderer from the beginning, is also the father of lies," said Jesse, bitterly. "I might have expected this. But it will not serve your turn."

The wretched pariah dog had come sneaking into sight, round one of the huts. Westoby snatched up a potsherd that lay beneath his hand, and flung it at the poor brute, with a tremendous curse; but it was

the only relief he allowed himself. Towards his opponent he kept a strong hand on his temper; he had not yet heard as much as he thought well.

"You don't know what I mean?" the younger man went on, with more excitement. "Are your hands, then, perhaps so used to blood that you have a choice of the meanings you might put to my words?"

Still Westoby answered nothing.

"You thought that this sin, at least, would never find you out; that I can well believe. It was only a poor native—a black," continued Runciman, with intense bitterness—"a man without a friend. So because he dared to serve his Maker better than you, the white man, his master, chose, you rose up and smote him and slew him, and went your way."

"So?" said Westoby. He spoke slowly, thoughtfully; pulling a little at his beard.

From that time he made no pretence at indifference any more; he sat, openly watchful, and never took his eyes off Jesse's face. "So?" he repeated.

"Ah!" cried the other, triumphantly. "Now, then, perhaps, you understand. Only see now, how friendless was this man, who has the Lord Himself for his avenger! See, now, how this sin, committed, as you thought, in the dark places of the ends of the earth, has been brought home to you! Did you ever think of him again—your false witness? your wretched tool?"

Westoby bent forward a little, his eyes attentive as before.

"A tramp, a miserable outcast, why did he not die the dog's death he deserved, alone, unheeded, in any ditch, any corner of the veld? Why, when the pains of hell gat hold upon him, and the terrors of death were overwhelming him, why was *I* brought to

hear the cry of his confession, wrung from a conscience you might well have thought as dead as your own; I who knew you, who could little fail to recognize you again? Why was all this?" he cried.

Westoby remained silent.

"Ah!" continued Jesse; and now the full tide of his indignation, his triumph, his almost personal joy in the day of vengeance swept up and bore him away. "Ah! you, who thought yourself so secure!" he cried; "who said in your heart, 'There shall no harm happen unto me!' Where are they now, all your proud boastings? Will you cease now, perhaps, to trouble the Lord's heritage? Ah! you, who were so gracious in warning *me*, forsooth, in sparing *me!*" He laughed aloud. "Had you not better be looking to yourself?"

"Take care," said Westoby, very quietly.

"Take you care!" cried Jesse, more passionately than before. "This is no language any more, from you to me. Put rather your face in the dust"—he pointed downwards, with a gesture of passionate exultation, "put your face in the dust, if so there may be any hope! Ay! lay your body as the ground, and as the street to them that pass over! Enemy of the Lord, created only for this day of vengeance! laughing-stock of His people! slave of the meanest of His servants! Do you not see then, yet, that He has delivered you into my hand? Your liberty, your very life——"

In that instant, Westoby was on his feet.

"Fool!" he cried.

There was that in his voice which made itself heard and felt through all the tumult of that triumphant defiance. There was anger in it—furious anger; but it was not

this that arrested more than Runciman's attention—even the whole torrent of his excitement. It was the immense, the uncontrollable scorn that breathed in it; by that tone the mere contemptuous word seemed to be made to blast and scathe, like something tangible.

"So this was the mighty matter that was to make me your slave, your laughing-stock—that was what you said, I reckon; I don't forget. My liberty! my life! Why, you miserable, muddle-headed fool!" he said, "that d——d nigger's carcase itself could do me as much harm as you can."

There fell a silence: one of those silences which are not to be computed by time. The sun had gone down; the west, all one red, was barred, here and there, with level lines of purple cloud. There were no more shadows now; the time had come when all the world was shadow.

Jesse spoke.

"That," he said, still holding his head high, but with less confidence than before, "that we shall prove."

"Go and prove it, by all means!" said Westoby, as before. "Go and shout it in the Market Square, if that'll make you feel any better; don't mind for me. It'll make a thundering big sensation there, I reckon! Folks out here just run mad over a nigger, more or less, sent to the devil a bit sooner than he'd have gone anyhow, don't they? Take your —— story to the lawyer chaps, if you like. They'll ask you for evidence—that's no odds; you've got witnesses, of course, haven't you? Anyway, you'll have had that precious scoundrel's story properly taken down, and signed, and witnessed, won't you?"

Silence alone answered him; it was answer enough. Brought face to face with

actualities, already Jesse was becoming bewildered. His nerve began to go; it was, indeed, of that order to which defeat means demoralization—swift, complete, inevitable.

In a certain cowed slackening of every line and curve, Westoby could read a tale which he could well interpret. Native blood had paid such visible homage to him before, and he knew how to follow up his advantage.

"And you dared!" he thundered, suddenly releasing all hold on his temper. "You darned, impudent, low-bred cur of a white-skinned nigger! You dared to stand up to me! to come the boss over me!" He seized his enemy by the collar with a grasp in which Jesse was as helpless as a child, and shook him till earth and sky seemed all one vibrating blackness. "By the Lord!" he cried "I'll teach you better! Go to

——, and tell your black brother who sent you!"

His other hand was already at Jesse's throat; and then, all in a minute, he had won.

Among his acquaintance, Jesse Runciman probably passed for a brave man. As a matter of fact, of mere animal courage, when unsustained by excitement, he had very little; his courage was a mood, like other moods, not an inherent organic possession. He might have gone openly to the stake, for his principles, like a hero; a violent death—purposeless, lonely, brutal—he could not face even, as Westoby would have expressed it, like a gentleman. Now, physically giddy and tremulous with the effects of Westoby's bodily violence, giddy and confounded mentally with the first taunt of race that had ever been levelled at himself—a taunt which, somehow, seemed

to have evoked in him a consciousness of that very inferiority which Westoby implied in it—his nerve gave way altogether. He caught at his assailant's arm with both his hands, and clung to it with a grasp which, desperate though it was, would have been futile enough if the other man had been more in earnest.

"No!" he cried, helplessly, with a sort of sob in his voice, "don't, for the love of heaven! I—I can't die like this."

Westoby simply tightened his grasp a little.

"I—I beg your pardon for—for anything I said that—I didn't mean——"

Westoby dropped one hand, retaining his hold with the other, but more easily.

"Oh, if that's to be the tune for the future, my young fighting-cock," he said, grimly enough, but more quietly, "well, you've just saved yourself by the skin of

your teeth—by the skin of your teeth," he repeated, slowly weighing out each syllable. "There, get along with you!" he said, suddenly. He let go his hold with a roughness which sent the other staggering backwards as if it had been a push. He stumbled up against one of the huts, and stood there, really incapable, for the time, of standing without its support.

"I ain't going to do it this time," continued Westoby. "Mind your own business, and I don't want to do it at all; but if ever you're in a hurry to make acquaintance with kingdom come, just you come to me with your cheek again, and if wringing your neck will do the job, why I'll oblige you, or my name's not Tom Westoby."

He paused. Jesse could not hide, had not even the spirit left to try to hide, the irrepressible nervous shudder which shook him as he stood. The hour of shame might

be to come; just now he was as much subdued beyond even feeling shame as any native to whom this white man was so obviously and naturally lord and master as to leave no more room for humiliation, in even abject submission, than humanity may feel at abasing itself before deity.

"So, now," continued Westoby, "you'd best be getting along home to that pretty little white wife of yours. Ay! it would have been hard luck never to have seen her any more, wouldn't it?"

"Don't!" cried Jesse again, imploringly.

"Well, you're right enough to feel you've got something there worth living for; and if you've any sense left, you'll be minding that instead of meddling with me. They're kittle cattle at best; ay, even when they're your own breed. And you—well, I reckon you've not got the plainest sort of sailing before *you*."

Jesse moved uneasily; his fingers locking and unlocking, twitched with restless nervous motions, like those of a woman.

"What——" he began, faintly.

"What do I know about it? Only what keeping his eyes open will teach anyone about a woman by the end of three weeks—anyone that isn't quite a fool. And that ain't entered for the stakes himself; that, of course."

Jesse made a motion as if to speak; then again; but nothing came. What, indeed, could he say, who, for those stakes of which the other spoke so lightly, was ready to enter nothing less than his soul?

"See here, now," continued Westoby. "You being you, and she being she, it don't want a conjuror to guess that you ain't making the running just like you could wish. And it might be that I—knowing a bit

of you and she both—could do you a good turn some day, in that line. What a fool you'd be rather to get yourself knocked on the head for the good of the next comer! And that's the end of being at loggerheads with me—and the sure end, too!"

His voice became menacing again, for a moment; then he went up to Jesse and clapped a hand on his shoulder. "But you won't be such a fool!" he said. "Come, we've played it out, fair and square; you licked first, now I have. We're just where we were before we ever met at all; there's nothing to do now but just to shake hands. You'll do that, I reckon?"

He held out his great rough hand; Jesse Runciman put his into it, and if he had certainly known that he was therewith delivering over his soul, he would scarcely, at this moment, have found power to refuse

a request which was equivalent to a command.

He put his hand in that of Westoby: the next instant Westoby was striding away across the veld towards the north, and Jesse standing there in the darkness, his fingers tingling almost to pain with the pressure of the giant's grasp; of himself, the world, or what had happened, he had scarcely any understanding at all.

## CHAPTER XV.

Two little letters in a scrawling school-girl hand; a marker in her Bible; a string of spiral alabaster white shells from Somerset Strand, knotted together with a blue ribbon, which hung on the wall near her bed; these, and such as these, were all that was left to Sarah Arkwright of her little girl. These of things tangible and visible; of other things, plain to her alone, the echo haunting all her heart of bird-like laughter, of a brisk, bustling patter of footsteps, light as a child's; the memory of a little curly head nestled in her bosom, of kisses, with which, half-saucy, half-pleading, wholly loving lips,

had stopped "Grannie's" remonstrances, even while begging her forgiveness: memories of all that mothers bereaved must miss, without a mother's recognized right to mourn.

When she stood at the school-house gate, and watched the cart which carried Mattie from her disappear; when the last flutter of the traveller's handkerchief had become also but a memory, she felt for a moment as if she could bear no more. She turned with an unconscious gesture, instinct with that forlornness, which, at the last, had even dried up her tears, and saw Sam watching her with a sort of awkward wistfulness. The next moment he was looking elaborately into space, and whistling abstractedly. But she had seen, and her heart reproached her for selfishness, much as a mother's might do for shadowing with uncomprehended grief the spirit of her child. She came

up to him, and laid her hand gently on his arm.

"Don't mind about me, Sam," she said, soothingly, as it were; "I'm not going to fret."

He looked very much relieved.

"That's right, missus," he said, cheerily, but not exactly unsympathetically. "It's hard lines saying good-bye and all that, ain't it? such chums as you and she were, too; but you've got something left, haven't you!"

He wanted to say, "somebody," but did not dare: he had never yet summoned up courage sufficient to make even so much love as this to his wife.

"I have many more mercies than I deserve, I know," said Sarah, humbly; but if, at that moment, they were not actively present to her mind, in detail, perhaps she will not be counted a very grievous

hypocrite. "Shall we go home?" she said. "It seems rather empty here—and it is getting cold."

In fact, the sun had dipped behind the mountains; the sudden, strange chill of parting day, liker to death than is anything else in Nature, struck upon the air. Even as she spoke, Sam was wrapping a shawl round her shoulders, with a look of conscious pride in his forethought. She started a little, in surprise, as she felt the warmth.

"How good you are to me always," she said, gratefully.

"Don't," he said, rather gruffly; "I wish you wouldn't talk like that."

"Not thank you?" she said, smiling faintly. "You wouldn't have me ungrateful, I'm sure."

He gave a rather vicious kick to a pebble lying in his path.

"Oh! gratitude be hanged," he mut-

tered ; a remark of which she could not at all understand the spirit, though she had schooled herself to hear the form without any outward sign of discomposure.

They came to the gate. Suddenly she faltered, yet it was scarcely of herself she was thinking then. She stretched out her hands towards the spot where Mattie had disappeared.

"Oh! God bless her!" she cried; "bless my Mattie! Preserve her going out and her coming in ; keep her under the shadow of Thy wings! Oh! let no harm happen unto her, nor any evil thing come near her dwelling!" She clasped her hands upon the gate-post and bowed her face upon them in a renewed passion of tears. "Oh! I am blind; I am all in the dark," she sobbed. "I don't know what she is going to : I don't know what to ask for her—only God bless her, God bless her! There is

nothing more at all, but only that. Oh! I know that's everything; if my heart is so proud, so wicked as to think she'd be any safer, any better off for being with *me*, I deserve that she should go! But, oh! my Mattie, my little girl, that never went right away from me in all her life before!"

She had raised her head; in default of any other human creature who would be likely to understand the outpouring of her heart, she turned her tearful eyes upon her husband.

Perhaps it was a little hard on Sam. All her unfailing obedience and dutifulness, all her gratitude and considerateness seemed to him, just then, of little account—mere stones for bread, so long as he felt that he had no real interest in her heart, no such interest as had the light-headed, light-hearted girl who, to the looker-on, seemed to give little indeed in return for so much devotion.

"Oh! don't you bother about her, old lady!" he said; "she'll be all right, you bet. I should think she was a sort that would manage to get along well anywhere."

There had never been much love lost between Samuel Arkwright and Mattie Runciman; they were constitutionally antipathetic. Yet Sam really tried to make the remark sound kindly and consolatory; but he was a very poor dissembler, and Sarah's instinct in this matter had all the sensitive delicacy of a lover's. She did not go so far as to resent his failure. But with a patience too long used to disappointment even to think of sighing, she drew back once more within herself; from that day forward there would be yet another chamber in her soul where, with her joy or with her bitterness, she would have to sit alone.

"Yes, she has a happy heart, my Mattie," she said, trying to smile; and that

was almost the last time she ever spoke of Mattie in his presence.

The gate shut behind them ; she walked on a few yards in silence, drying the last of her now quiet tears. Then she looked up at him.

"There ; I've done," she said. "The worst is over now."

She did not suspect that the worst was to come, and to come slowly, with imperceptible yet daily increase of desolation. Solitary confinement is a cumulative torture, so to speak, and Sarah's whole life now had entered into silence. She had never even imagined a loneliness so complete as that which compassed her about in these days.

To have had the hope that Mattie had would have filled her life to overflowing, would have taken the sting from every parting, the loneliness from a heart bereaved

of every friend on earth. But to her it had not been given. The first pang of jealousy Sarah had ever known in her life, shot through her heart on the day, not many weeks since, when Mattie had whispered her secret with her face hidden on her friend's breast. Sarah was glad that it was hidden. Left alone, she wept and prayed herself into resignation, finally into an unselfish content. She did her best, but the emotion remained all too pale for joy.

"I shall be 'Grannie,' really, when Mattie's baby comes," she said to herself, with a smile whose patience was a little more sad than tears.

That night it had chanced that Mr. Glasse had chosen to begin upon the book of Samuel for reading and exposition. Of the exposition, dutifully though she listened as a rule, Sarah for once heard but little. The story itself she heard as she had never

heard it before, with every most human fibre of her woman's heart wrung and thrilling. That day she herself had wept with Hannah.

"'Why is thy heart grieved?'" repeated the minister, in the deliberate conventionally pitched tones at once of age and habit. "'Am I not better to thee than ten sons?'" Sarah glanced across at Sam, who sat looking with painful propriety at nothing in particular, and marvelled. "'Better to thee than ten sons?' Could any husband really be that to any wife? 'And she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore.'"

But, for the first time in her need, Sarah did not dare to pray, lest even that utterance to her longing might break down her hard-won resignation into some cry all too passionate: "'Give me children, or I shall die.'"

It may be owned that there was nothing

in the situation that called for the surrender of all personal hopes with which she met it; but Sarah had long been more unhappy even than she quite knew herself. She had reached the point at which it seems wiser not to begin to hope, since not to expect is, at least, not to be disappointed.

The very work itself to which she had so looked forward was one element in her disappointment. By degrees, she had made a little for herself, gathering up such odds and ends as even the perverse ingenuity of Mr. Glasse could find no pretence for refusing her. In point of fact, she was not fitted for the work. There was no question here of any soul-stirring conversion, no thought of persecution or opposition of any kind, no call on the active side of faith and courage. In certain cases, indeed — cases of sickness, or bereavement, or extreme old age, when animal life is lowest, and

some kind of reality is forced upon even the most superficial—she had more success than many, and it was in such ministrations as these that she found her now rare moments of happiness. But, under ordinary circumstances, her temperament made her incapable of dealing with these natures — emotional, affectionate, glib, but hopelessly invertebrate, with truth an unknown quantity even among the most religious, and self-respect only one degree above truth, what could she make of them? She, to whom the doctrine of racial inferiority was a heresy, and any attempt at government founded on such doctrine little less than a sin?

She did not lose her faith; but faith was no longer synonymous with joy, and with the loss of her joy, Sarah felt a drain upon her spiritual strength such as she had never known before. For one thing, her

patience with Mr. Glasse began to fail to a degree that shocked and surprised her. Certainly, he had not improved in his treatment of her. He was not making the slightest effort against his prejudice; perhaps he was past the age when such an effort could have availed in any case. Adaptability is scarcely to be looked for at sixty-eight. He had never forgiven Sarah for having been the unconscious cause of that first and last quarrel with Sam which had half broken his heart. Not daring to provoke a scene with him again, the old minister became quite an accomplished hypocrite; in his son's presence, never a word of reproof or complaint to his son's wife passed his lips. Sam had not the least idea of what the poor girl had to suffer during the long hours of his daily absence.

"If you would only tell me *how* to do

right, father!" she would exclaim, in despair. "You say I'm not making a happy home for Sam. If you'd only tell me what to do!"

"That's not a question a wife ought to need to put to anybody," returned the minister, with dignity. "There's feelings, or there ought to be, in the heart of every woman that *loves* her husband" (Sarah's eyelids dropped with a little sigh) "as should be a plain guide to her as to what he wants without asking any third parties. It was a pleasure to *me* once to think of these things; but never mind that. Don't think *I'm* coming interfering between husband and wife. I know my place better than that, I should hope!"

"Oh! what have I done that you should be so cruel to me? You're kind, you're good to everybody in the place except me; and I've not deserved it— Oh! I can't

think I have. Why did I ever come here at all?"

Mr. Glasse would have been very glad of an answer to the same question on his own account. Why, indeed? But he chose to resent it, from her.

"If it comes to questioning Providence," he said, "of course I'll say no more. There's some folks never do seem to know when they are well off."

"How can I think it well? You two were happy before I came; and now—— I never made mischief in all my life before; God forgive me if I am boasting, but I never did. And now I never seem able to keep clear of it."

"Oh! it's not *your* fault, of course; ask your husband, else. Never mind. There's a little place just outside the village," said the minister, with a chastened air, "as I've had in my mind for some time past. It's

humble, but when it's been cleaned up a bit it'll be as good a place for a poor old fellow as has wore out his welcome to end his days in, as any other. Likely it won't be long before even that'll be a deal finer and larger than he'll be needing any more at all. I'll go and see about it to-morrow. I daresay Sam 'll run down and see me sometimes in the evenings when you can spare him. You'll not be afraid of that?"

This had been quite a sudden inspiration a few weeks before, but it had proved to be an inspiration of genius. So far it had lost none of its effect.

"Oh! father," sobbed Sarah, "don't, don't talk like that! If praying and trying can make things any different—and surely, surely they must by-and-bye—I'll make you happy yet. Only don't do that! Father, you won't say anything to Sam

about going away? You won't, father? Oh! promise me that!"

So matters would be patched up time after time. But Sarah's moral sense was too healthy to allow her to take all the blame of these miserable scenes on herself. Then, deep down in some corner of her heart, she began to think that, in some way or other, Sam ought to save her from them. It is true she did her very best to keep him from suspecting her unhappiness, therefore, perhaps, it was a little illogical of her to feel that he ought to have guessed it. But it is ill asking logic from a woman's sore heart.

Well, duty remained to her, she had never failed in that. She was yet to learn how hard bare duty may come to be in a relationship which Nature has intended for something more. That lesson, too, was not long delayed. It was taught her on the day

when she went with Sam to pay their first formal call on Mrs. Reeves.

It had not been till nearly a month after Mattie's departure that this lady arrived to reign in her stead. The most sympathetic person could scarcely have prevented this from being a trying visit to Sarah, and Mrs. Reeves was not sympathetic. She was a well-looking little woman, of about thirty, very compact, and bright, and hard—a regular townswoman, who felt herself in banishment, and was at no special pains to hide her sentiments. In the sanctity of private life her husband called her Tilly ; in more nervous and less expansive moments, such as the present, he addressed her as Mrs. Reeves, and did not seem too sure how she would take even so much familiarity as that. Already the look, the whole atmosphere of the place had been changed beyond recognition.

Sarah, never much of a talker, grew more silent in a sort of confusion between the ghosts of the old and the hard reality of the new. Conversation languished considerably, for even Sam himself, when feeling circumscribed in the matter of slang, made but a poor show in comparison with his usual form.

Presently Mr. Reeves asked Sarah whether she had heard from Mrs. Runciman since she had been at Kimberley.

"Mrs. Runciman was a very old and dear friend of Mrs. Arkwright's," he explained to his wife, for no reason beyond pure nervousness.

"Indeed!" said Mrs. Reeves, civilly uninterested.

"We must try and do our best to prevent her from feeling the change to be a loss—the alteration to be altogether a calamity," added Mr. Reeves, as an amend-

ment, after a pause in which his nervousness grew clamorous.

"Mattie wrote to me once, soon after they had settled in," said Sarah, timidly, after another gap of silence into which Mrs. Reeves had not thrown herself with the alacrity which such a suggestion as that of her well-intentioned lord required. "I hope she will be very happy; she wrote as if she was."

"I don't know but what *I* could be in her place," said Mrs. Reeves, drily.

"I hope you will be happy in this one, ma'am," said Sarah, feeling as though she somehow owed an apology; "I'm sure we shall all try our best to make you so."

"Thanks," said Mrs. Reeves, politely, but without effusion.

"Mrs. Reeves has not been accustomed to the seclusion of the country," explained the schoolmaster, pacifically. "She will

soon learn to appreciate the many advantages of rural life."

If Mrs. Reeves' face meant anything, it meant: "Oh! will she?" But she only said, rather more graciously:

"Well, of course it seems strange to me after a town. But it certainly is prettier, and housekeeping is wonderfully cheaper than in Cape Town, no doubt."

"And it's cheap there to what it is in Kimberley," put in Sam, by way of something soothing.

"Indeed, I was saying, wasn't I, Mrs. Reeves?" ventured the host, reassured by the appearance of an ally, "I was saying that, merely as regards temporalities, I doubt whether our young friend has bettered his position so much as might be supposed."

"If you mean the supply of the needful," said Sam, "I should think there wasn't a doubt but what he's changed for the worse.

What did he ever need to put his hand in his pocket for, here? I expect Mrs. Runciman will want to be a good manager to make out at all, up there."

"Well, you may put things so, of course; but it does give position, to be a minister," said Mrs. Reeves, rather discontentedly. "But some people have no ambition," she added, with a glance at her husband, which he did not seem to feel reassuring. "There's people who would be content to go on like a horse in a mill, till they're as slow and good-for-nothing as he is, provided they were left enough in peace to grow fat."

"My dear," suggested Mr. Reeves, deprecatingly, "there is no question which is not susceptible of being regarded from two points of view, at least. There is no lot so humble but it has its compensations; none so exalted but it has its disadvantages."

"Right you are," said Sam, with an amiable desire to back up his host, whose tone, very ill adapted to his words, seemed to confess a pressing need of support. "It's just about as broad as it's long. It's a fine thing to be a minister, and gives you a lift, in a way, no doubt; but for a mere matter of bread and cheese it's not to be compared to a berth like yours or mine. Rather not!" he concluded in a tone of emphatic satisfaction.

Mrs. Reeves smiled thinly.

"You are content with the compensations, then, Mr. Arkwright, it seems. I have tried them pretty well all round, I think. I wouldn't mind having a try at the disadvantages, for a change; but I'm never likely to get a chance."

Mr. Reeves laughed, nervously and conciliatingly.

Sarah sat and listened in silence, and

unprotesting even by a look; yet every word jarred upon her soul till silence was almost pain. Position; money! It did not occur to her then that Mattie's way of considering the matter had been little more exalted than that to which she was listening now. She thought of Jesse Runciman's vigil of fasting, and prayer, and tears; it seemed as though she should have craved pardon of his memory for the language which was being bandied about so lightly beneath the very roof which had witnessed those outpourings of his soul. And that it should be Sam, her husband, part of herself, who should be parading, with evident satisfaction, the lowest views of all!

## CHAPTER XVI.

"Oh, lor'!" said Sam. "Poor old Reeves! Who'd have thought it?"

The ordeal was over; husband and wife were walking homewards together. The short twilight was deepening into night in the thick shadow of the gum-trees in the lane; the evening star now gleamed, now vanished, amidst the branches; the air was laden with the pungent medicinal eucalyptus odour.

"Poor old Reeves!" said Sam, again, and laughed out in the darkness.

Sarah felt the arm which lay in his drawn closer, and squeezed a little. Pre-

sently, his own was round her waist. There came over her, all at once, a sort of impossibility of making any response. Why the strain of months should, just this evening, have come to a climax, it would be hard to say. Sam noticed nothing.

"I've had awful luck, old girl!" he said; "a jolly lot better than I deserve!"

"You're very kind, Sam," she forced herself to murmur, mechanically. And he was feeling so elate that he allowed a formula which he was beginning to hate to pass without remonstrance.

They came to a spot where a tree that had been cut down lay by the roadside.

"There's no hurry, is there, missus?" said Sam. "Suppose we sit down here a bit? It's such a jolly evening."

He spread his handkerchief elaborately over the log for her. She took her place obediently; it was too nearly dark for her

to be obliged to smile. The frogs were clamouring from every ditch and pond for miles round; the voice of their crying—a dull hurrying clang of wooden bells, ceaseless, urgent—filled up the silence in which she sat.

"If I've any fault to find with you, old lady, it's more that I don't hear enough of you than that I hear too much," said Sam.

And, at that moment, as she sat with locked lips, her heart seemed bursting with a new desire of speech—such speech as she must never, never address to him; for was not this her husband? for whom, in the mouth of a wife, there must be no reproof.

"I wonder if there could ever have been any talk of running old Reeves for the ministry?" said Sam, after a pause, in which he had been recalling the incidents of

the visit. "Seemed to me as if it was rather a sore subject with Mrs. R. Like enough, she thought it was a case of sour grapes with me; she looked as if she did. It wasn't, though. Oh, lor'!" he exclaimed, with renewed laughter, "fancy *me* a minister!"

He put his hands together, turned up his eyes, and began half-chanting, half-reciting, with immense unction, and that breadth of effect which made him so popular in comic songs at village entertainments:

"'Dearly beloved brethren, is it not a sin
To peel a potato, and throw away the skin?'"

The woman beside him shivered a little; yet the evening was not cold.

"'The potatoes feed the pigs,'"

continued Sam, in a tone of affectionate argument,

"'And the pigs——'"

He broke off, overcome with his own humour.

Then, after a moment, all at once, and without any warning, he said, in a different tone — light enough, but with apparent intention :

"Should you like me to be a minister, old lady ?"

"No, Sam."

She spoke with a sort of tension, in a stifled voice.

He seemed to be collecting himself for a great effort of magnanimity.

"If I thought you would like it—very much——"

"I shouldn't. Oh, don't begin to think that !"

"Very well. After all, you know, it's quite true what I said to Mrs. Reeves ; we shouldn't be a bit better off in——"

She had been sitting with her face drooping, averted ; now she turned it upon him, suddenly.

"And if we should be, God forbid that you should do it!" she said; and there was that in her voice which he had never heard before, which was rarely heard at all by any. Her soul needed to be stirred to its very depths before that thrill came into her gentle utterance. "God forbid that anyone belonging to me should come to that!—to the curse of coming crouching for a piece of silver; of saying, 'Put me into one of the priest's offices, that I may eat a piece of bread!'"

She paused a moment; she sat with one hand pressed to her heart, as if to stifle at once her pain and its utterance. It was too late for that last; her soul, once unburdened, would tolerate no half-measures of relief.

"Oh, well, I didn't mean——" began Sam, slightly disconcerted. "Of course, I know that's not all the way of looking at

it; I know there's a serious part, and all that sort of thing."

"Do you know that?" she asked, with a sort of dreary wonder. "Do you ever think of things so? Oh, Sam, if you ever really did, if you had ever felt your own soul to know it, you couldn't take everything so easy as you do!"

Sam was silent, in sheer bewilderment.

"Oh, no, you never have," she went on, more passionately; "things don't mean anything to you. Your ground brings forth plentifully, and you take your ease and are merry; you have never felt need of anything, body or soul. You seem to do by nature the works of grace, and don't see that anything more is wanted. And what will you do in the day when the fire shall try every man's work? The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force; but you—oh, it is all too

comfortable, and quiet, and content; you look at everything too low! It isn't right nor safe!"

She ceased, and there was a moment's pause. She was still too much worked up to begin to feel amazed at her own self; but for Sam, that moment of silence was filled with nothing short of blank amazement. He broke it with a long whistle, in which amazement alone as yet found voice.

"Why, Sarah!" he began. Then, quite suddenly, he broke into a sort of ecstasy of laughter. "And I who was as good as saying you scarcely seemed to know you had a tongue in your head! Why, Mrs. Reeves must be for all the world like those chaps that advertize writing to be learned in three lessons, only you've learned the use of your tongue in one. Bully for her!"

He laughed, and laughed.

She did not say one other word; only

she stood up from where she sat. Perhaps it was the first initiative movement of her married life. Sam got up too.

"Time to be getting back, missus?" he said; and they turned their faces homewards. He made an instinctive movement to give her his arm, as usual; there was no response on her part, and whether she had refused it, or had not observed it, he could not have said. He made no comment or farther attempt; but he whistled again very softly, and this time he did not laugh. They walked back, side by side, in silence.

When they reached the house, Sarah went straight in, without a look or word. Sam stood a moment or so on the stoep, then he followed slowly. The lamp was lighted in the *voor-kammer*, and the *Argus* newspaper, the minister's evening literature, lay open beside his chair, but the old man himself was not there; nor was Sam, at that

moment, particularly anxious either to find or be found by him.

There had, in fact, been times of late when—without prejudice to his loyalty or affection to his adoptive father—the young man had been half-conscious of a wish that he could have a house of his own. Which marked a certain amount of development.

He sat down by the table and lit his pipe. For the first time in his life, perhaps, he felt a vague desire to think things out, but he had not yet reached a mental age in which he had the power to put his wish into execution. He did not know how to think. So pretty soon he pulled the newspaper towards him, and began to read in a mechanical, fragmentary sort of way, with little perception of what he read. He sat and read and smoked, and felt a little unhappy, just a very little hurt, and very much puzzled indeed.

Perhaps it was twenty minutes or half-an-hour that he had been sitting there, and the minister had not come back, when the door out of their own room opened and Sarah came in. She came in slowly, almost timidly, and her eyes, which looked half-blind with weeping, seemed scarcely to venture to raise themselves to his face, as she came and stood before him.

"Will you forgive me, Sam?" she said. Her voice was not so much tremulous as exhausted. "I am very, very sorry."

Sam threw aside his paper gladly enough.

"Forgive you!" he began cheerfully, "why, there's nothing to forgive!"

The light fell full upon her face—white and heavy-eyed, and distressful with sorrow of a kind he had never seen in it before: the expression of a bitter repentance. He was almost startled.

"Why!" he exclaimed, "you've never been crying your eyes out all this time over a little tiff like that? Well! it wasn't even that much. It takes two, you know, to make——"

He broke off, with a sudden perception that he had not exactly hit upon the most consolatory line of argument.

"I know, Sam," she said, in that weary, humbled voice. "It was all my fault; you have nothing to be sorry for. Oh! you have never been anything but good, and kind and patient, from the first day till now. I don't deserve it." And then, as though the burden of her remorse was too heavy to stand up under, she knelt down beside him, and hid her face upon his knees. "It was wicked of me, Sam," she sobbed, "but——"

He sprang to his feet, and lifted her up almost roughly, pushing her back into his chair.

"Sarah, for my sake don't do that!" he exclaimed. "What are you about? what are you thinking of?"

He was so really shocked that, for the moment, at least, his voice and manner took a sort of manliness that was new to them. It was transient enough, but it had been, and it contained a pledge of not unhopeful possibilities.

Just now, nothing further came of it. When he spoke next, pulling her hands down from before her face, his style, like his action, was that of the rather awkward, extremely youthful young man whom alone she knew; of whom alone, indeed, he was as yet conscious himself.

"Look here, old lady," he said, "you shan't bully yourself this way — do you hear? I wouldn't let anyone do it to you, and I'm blessed if I let you do it to yourself."

"I had no right. It was very wrong of me to speak to you so."

"Bless you," he said, cheerfully, "it didn't hurt me. I like it. Honour bright! I expect you were quite right, only I don't seem to have quite caught hold of what you meant, exactly—just what you want me to do. But, anyway, don't you be afraid to speak out, missus. I'd always a deal sooner folks said things out, than I would keep on fancying they're thinking 'em."

She shrank a little for a moment, and her eyes dropped lower. He had proposed a dilemma to which she saw no answer. By-and-bye he was to begin to feel the force of it himself; at present the idea contained no hint, for him, of future unpleasantness. Sam was shrewd at times, but he had little synthetic ability; he seldom saw the deductions to be drawn from his own observations.

He lifted his wife's drooping head and kissed her, and dried her poor smarting eyes with his own handkerchief, with a tenderness disguised as burlesque. And she was content, for now, to hold his hand, and let her aching head rest upon his shoulder, and feel the peace of present forgiveness. What though his last words contained promise of perplexities of conscience innumerable for the future? She was worn out, to-night, with moral struggle, for this one hour, at least, she was fain to rest.

For that night, then, so far so good. But matters could scarcely stand quite as before. If Samuel Arkwright was not much used to serious methodical thinking, he was by no means incapable of reflection, and in a fragmentary inconsecutive sort of way, he thought more about that scene in the lane than was altogether for his happiness. That Sarah had no warmer feeling for him

than friendliness and gratitude, he had known, and had begun to be a little troubled in knowing it. That even this much was the result of principle and forbearance he had not once suspected, and it could scarcely be a pleasant reflection for any husband. He was not, then, up to his wife's standard, and he saw little hope that he ever should be—so vague, as he himself had said, were his ideas of what she really did expect of him.

For his age, Sam was, in many ways, curiously undeveloped. If he had been left to himself, he would probably not have thought of marriage for the next three or four years, and it would have been quite soon enough. Perhaps no great harm had been done by thus antedating the time that nature intended ; only it was a little hard on him to have to work out his development under such comparatively complex conditions

—a little hard, too, on the woman who, his senior at present in all but actual years, was tied to him during the process. Leisurely in mental growth by nature, there had been very little hitherto to bring him out. Rather had both his circumstances and his temperament contributed to keep him back, as it were. He had never known trouble; he had never known any real severity of temptation. Severe effort of any kind he had never been called upon to make; his responsibilities were not heavy in themselves, and he discharged them without any morbid reflections on their weight. His life, indeed, had been very easy and he took it easily; the standard around him had never been painfully high, it was limited to the ordinary requirements of morality and respectability, and to Sam to be moral and respectable was no difficulty at all. He liked life to be amusing, cer-

tainly, but he was very easily amused; his tastes were healthy and simple, and he was, by nature, singularly unselfish—a quality, it is true, so precious as to give ground for the highest possible hopes of any character in which it is found. For the rest, the unspoilable spoilt child of the settlement from his boyhood, he had never had an aspiration or an ambition in his life, and nobody had ever seen any particular reason why he should.

To come upon such a nature as this, with a sudden demand that he should take life seriously; should raise his standard to some unimaginable height; should leave his sunny cruising among the shallows and launch out into some unknown, unsounded deep—was simply to produce first bewilderment, then a sort of discouragement and timidity, and therewith a certain slight sense of injury.

From that day forward, his wife came before Sam more or less in the light of a critic, and he was not used to act before critics, only before an accommodating and appreciative audience. It made him nervous, and he resented it a little, too. It seemed somewhat ungrateful of her; that she was his superior, in many ways, *he* was most freely willing to admit, but should *she* not have been a little blind to the deficiencies of the man that loved her?

But she did not love him; never had done so: she had not even (he told himself) that amount of gentle liking for him which, at least, he had thought to possess. Well then, why——? Sometimes, when he was away from her, at work in the shops or spending some evening *en garçon* again, among his bachelor associates, he would almost resolve, with a sort of impatience, to live henceforward on that footing of mere

friendliness and protective kindness which he had marked out for himself as at once the least and the most that duty required of him, in the days when matrimony had seemed to him a condition to be, at best, endured. He would almost resolve this; and then he would go home and note the traces of her presence everywhere, in order, and purity, and peace; and, coming into the room where she was, see her moving about or sitting at work, always with that quiet devotional purposefulness, so to speak, which he had learned to feel and to appreciate, though not to interpret or understand; and watch the plain pale face, which he never remembered now was plain, light up to welcome him with the smile which she was never too busy or too much absorbed to remember. Then he would know, that, indeed, he loved her, and could not help loving her; it was no more in his power,

now, to whistle this love down the wind than it had been in his will, or even in his wish, to give it birth.

Still, from the time he made that unfortunate discovery regarding her sentiments, there came to be a difference. The change was very subtle, very slight; love, indeed, would have detected it, but Sarah's gentle, unexacting dutifulness let it pass unfelt, if not absolutely unobserved. He was not less kind, not less cordial in his manner; but he scarcely made so much demand upon her, either for time or sympathy as he had grown to do. Also, a certain *rapprochement* began to take place between him and the old minister. In little ways innumerable, now, the old man was conscious of a triumph, precious almost as a woman's, over a detested, a once successful rival, and if he could have made her feel it no doubt he would have done so.

But he could not. Sarah was honestly unaware of the nature of her husband's feeling for her. Her feeling for him was not of the kind which is likely to be swift to jealousy.

So with imperceptible widening of the rift the quiet months slid on; and then something happened which, once more, disturbed her terribly.

She had gone with Sam to spend the evening at a farm in the valley, about a mile beyond the settlement, a farm where occasional boarders used to be taken; generally teachers from Wellington or Stellenbach for the holidays, or now and then a couple on the honeymoon. It was one of these last they had gone to see—a friend of Sam's from Cape Town and his bride. The Reeves' were there, too, Mrs. Reeves being an acquaintance of the bride; a niece of the farmer, on a visit to her uncle and aunt,

who proved to have some suburban friends in common with the boarders, had been also invited to the festivities.

These began with tea, an ample and luxurious meal to which the party sat down soon after assembling. After that, and a little not very flourishing conversation, Miss Graaf, the niece, under much pressure, favoured the company with "No, Sir!" accompanying herself as best she might on the seraphina, which seemed to resent this prostitution of its harmonies to secular uses; it was a serious-minded instrument, accustomed only to hymns. Then there was a pause. It was generally understood that some entertainment other than conversation must be provided on these occasions, but the young couple evidently had nothing to suggest. They all sat about the round centre table, with its inevitable vase of everlastings in the middle; and Cassell's Illustrated Bible; a

thrilling revelation of convent life, in a paper cover; two or three Sunday-school prize books; and a copy of Thomson's Seasons, by way of literature, grouped around it.

Then Mrs. Reeves said:

"If anybody had a pack, we're just a nice-sized party for a game of cards.'

It was really a rather audacious suggestion for a member of the Primitive Gospellers to make in this country community. But, of course, only those of the party who belonged to that community could realize this. The bridegroom cheered up considerably at this suggestion, and Miss Graaf answered with alacrity:

"Uncle has some, I know. There was a commercial gentleman staying here last spring, and he left them. I don't know but what there may be two packs."

The bridegroom went off to secure the treasure; the party left behind began to clear

the table. Only Mrs. Arkwright, who was always used to be the first to give a helping hand in any work, stood where she had risen, motionless, as it seemed, with distress; her eyes sought her husband with a desperate appeal. Sam was clearing vigorously and did not at first observe her. To tell the truth, he had not been particularly startled personally. It would not be the first time in his life that he had played cards. Not, certainly, in Beulah itself; but on holiday visits to Cape Town, and during the years of his apprenticeship at the Paarl he had done so on occasion. If this was known in Beulah it had been winked at; no remonstrance had ever been addressed to him on the subject. But when, turning round, he saw his wife's piteous, almost terrified face, he understood it well enough to feel exceedingly uncomfortable.

He answered the mute summons of her

eyes, and came up to where she stood a little apart. She caught at his hand with a strange nervousness, as though to keep him by her.

"Oh! Sam," she whispered, "shan't we go home?"

The young man hesitated—the move, so simple to her, naturally enough seemed much more complicated to him. Before he could formulate any definite reply, his friend came back with the cards, and all the rest of the party took their seats round the table.

"How many are we?" said Mrs. Reeves, who felt that the brilliance of her suggestion had given her a right to pose as mistress of the ceremonies. "One, two, three——seven. Shall we try 'Commerce'? we all know that, I suppose. Come Mr. Arkwright, will you take the first deal?"

Sam was still standing beside Sarah; the tremulous touch of the fingers which

were lingering on his had a strange power to detain him. His own honest conscience did not really in the least echo the cry of this other conscience outside him, yet he could not close his ears to that one's appeal. On the other hand, he had never in his life done anything that could have seemed ill-natured, or unsociable. He hesitated; he looked at her almost pathetically for a dispensation; she felt the wavering of his heart, and the sickness of sudden hopelessness came over her own. She let her hand fall away from his, and her soul pleaded with his no more. Where was the use? it was always the same. Sam interpreted the movement as a permission, hailing it with a rather shame-faced relief, and slipped quietly into a chair between Miss Van Eyssen and the bride. Sarah drew back to a distant seat in the shadow.

"Isn't Mrs. Arkwright going to join

us?" asked Mrs. Reeves of Sam, not too politely.

"No; she doesn't know anything about it," said Sam, hastily. "She don't much care about these sort of things."

"Oh! if Mrs. Arkwright will do me the honour to sit by me, and permit me to give her a little assistance at first, I feel sure that in a round or two a lady of her capabilities will play as well as anyone," ventured Mr. Reeves, who did not understand the situation at all.

"Can't you see, Mr. Reeves, that it's against the lady's conscience?" said Mrs. Reeves, sharply, before Sarah could reply for herself. "I'm sure we'd none of us like to interfere with that."

The other women smiled discreetly; the host looked uncomfortable; Sam silently anathematized the accident of sex which made him powerless for vengeance. But

Mr. Reeves gazed at Sarah with a countenance beaming with respectful admiration.

"Ah! Mrs. Arkwright," he exclaimed, "if we all had your elevation and strength of principle, what a different world this might be!"

And then he let his eye fall with a quite undiminished innocent content on the little heap of cards which was accumulating before him, as Sam dealt them out with rather vicious energy. Mr. Reeves was decidedly lucky at games, and he liked them very much.

Mrs. Reeves more nearly tossed her head than was consistent with her code of manners; Sarah turned hers aside, a little more heart-sick than before. How much more comfortable to her soul would have been one of Jesse Runciman's rather haughty rebukes, exaggerated, if not unjust though they so often were! She sat apart,

and tried neither to look nor think, tried to forget what they were doing. But the party soon became much too lively to admit of any abstraction. Almost against her will she was forced to look and listen ; and of all the bitter hours she had been through since she came out, none had been so bitter as this.

The laughter, the growing boisterousness of the players, the tap of the counters on the wood as they changed hands, the too triumphant, or sometimes too irritable tones were terrible to her. Games do constitute a distinct trial of temper to some persons, and Mrs. Reeves was one of them. She was as decidedly unlucky as the schoolmaster was fortunate ; she did not lose with a good grace to anyone, and to her husband she could put no grace into her involuntary contributions at all. He, in the elation of a rare sense of superiority became quite cheery and audacious.

"Six over here, if you please, Tilly, my dear;" he would actually venture on this in his present mood, with a rather aggravating chuckle. And she would bite her red lips, and, muttering something doubtful about the correctness of his calculations, would push over her counters with a spiteful scrape, or toss them down with a bang, her colour heightened, her hard, bright eyes sparkling angrily.

As for the younger people, they were fairly romping. Sam, in particular, secretly uncomfortable, and conscious, as she would never have believed, of his wife's patient, unremonstrating, disapproving presence, grew as usual noisier and more pronounced from nervousness, and really was very conspicuous, indeed. He kept shouting out that his friend was cheating, and then, in a storm of laughter and exclamations, the two would make dashes at each other's counters across

the table till it shook again, and threaten each other with their fists; and then the bride, shrieking with laughter also, would fling her arms round her husband to keep him back, and Miss Van Eyssen, with becoming maidenly discretion, would giggle and even venture a gentle slap on Arkwright's arm, whereupon he began to nurse the injured member with howls—and so on. There was no harm in any of it, but it was not exactly the sort of behaviour to modify disapproval or overcome the prejudices of an already unsympathetic observer.

And to Sarah it meant so much. To her, loud voices, violent gestures, all too unrestrained demonstrations of animal spirits, except in the merest children, were almost physically painful; she shrank from them instinctively. But this was something worse. For, to her, all this was simply gambling; that the actual medium of gain and loss chanced

to be valueless, made no difference in her judgment of the principle—it was merely an accident. The excitement, the irritability, the unguardedness of tone and manner—all this was just what she would have expected. It adequately fulfilled the ideas she had acquired of the reckless gambler from the only sources whence she could have gained any acquaintance with him.

It was over at last; and by this time Sarah looked so white and weary that Sam, declining to wait for the proffered refreshment which she had refused, took her away at once. The night was utterly black; the threatened rain was coming down as it can do in South Africa, where nature, at least, seldom does anything by halves, whatever may be said of man. By the light of a lantern, and under shelter of the same umbrella, they made their way, little cheerfully, across the sodden veld, where what had

been a track was now little more than a shallow stream. To outward seeming, indeed, Sam was lively enough; in spite of rain, and darkness, and stumbling, he kept up an agreeable rattle of jokes, comments, and ejaculations; and if he got no reply he could scarcely complain, for he really left no opening for remark of any kind. But he could not keep up this sort of thing indefinitely. By-and-bye, as they turned into the road, he lapsed from chattering into whistling, then into a moment of silence. Then, all at once he raised the lantern, and for an instant scanned his wife's face by its light; in the strong, yet unsteady glare she looked more pale, more weary than before.

"You've been worrying, old lady, haven't you?" he said, with an attempt at ease.

She made no answer, unless a sigh, re-

pressed with pain, could be so called, and they walked on in silence till they were nearly at their own gate. Then he spoke again, with a sort of outburst.

"Come, missus, I know you must be thinking me a precious bad lot. Just say it out; give it me all you know. It clears the air."

This time the sigh was almost a sob, and she did not repress it; speak she could not. Doubt, despondency, dread—all conspired to bind her tongue.

"A chap that plays cards," he insisted; "a chap that can't say 'No'——"

"Oh! Sam, don't!" she broke out in despair. "Don't make me judge! It's not my place. I can't; I won't."

They stood by the gate, now. For the second time he made that fiery scrutiny of her face; and now he laughed, a little ruefully.

"You've done the judging already, old lady," he said.

And in truth, with bitter reluctance, so she had.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"Oh, Jesse, do either stay in or keep out. How can I do anything when you are fidgeting about like this?"

Mattie was in the parlour, surrounded by piles of bright-coloured materials, from which she was cutting off samples of different short lengths, glancing now and then at the clock, which drew towards four. Her husband had just come into the room for the fifth or sixth time. He was standing by the table, watching her, and Mattie had really not unfairly described him as fidgeting. He was ruffling about the stuffs; twisting bits of string round his

slight, nervous-looking fingers; opening and shutting her scissors whenever she laid them down for a moment. His eyes were restless, too; now they would be following her every movement; then he would turn them aside, hastily, almost as if he feared a rebuke.

"I do wish you had your teaching back again!" said Mattie, desperately, after a pause in which he had contrived to upset a box of pins and tear up a small paper of measurements. "Is there really nothing you can find to do?"

"What are *you* going to do?" he said, evading a question which he could not answer very satisfactorily.

"I've told you ever so many times that Mr. Blake is coming at four to settle something about the bazaar. He has a new idea about the decorations, and I'm cutting off these patterns for him to try the colours

—and, *please*, don't mess the things about so!" she said. Her tone was less petulant than her words; she really did try to put some restraint upon it; but it was scarcely wonderful that she felt fretted.

Jesse pushed all the things angrily away from him, up into a heap.

"Who *is* that fellow?" he exclaimed. "I'm sure *he* seems to have nothing to do! He——" He checked himself, and went on, rather sullenly, but more quietly: "Mr. Blake is always coming here."

"We have been in Kimberley ten weeks, and he has been here just twice," said Mattie, accurately, but not too ingenuously. "And, as you were out both times, I don't see that he's been in *your* way, anyhow. These things about private stalls can't be settled at the general meetings; that's not what they're meant for. And it isn't as if I was doing it for myself; I'd know what I'd

like for myself, and no more fuss about it; but you're bound to think more, if you're managing a thing for somebody else. Mr. Blake says Miss de Jongh is awfully particular about these things."

The amiable but not artistic Sophy had exactly two ideas on the subject of decoration. One was leno curtains over pink glazed calico; the other was leno curtains over Turkey twill. With either of these she was eternally content; and if Gerald did not know this, it was not for want of hearing her repeat the suggestion.

"I hate all this nonsense!" said Runciman, irritably, beginning to pace about the room. "Miss de Jongh knows plenty of people she could have asked to help, just as well as you. You're always working over it, one way or another, and I'm sure you ought not to be. It's too much for you; you know you ought to take care."

"I shall take plenty of care as soon as there's any real need; you needn't worry yourself about that. I know this won't do me any harm—good, rather."

She said the last words after a pause, with a sort of nervous earnestness, quite different from anything there had been in her tone before, which might have startled him if his own heart had gone more with his remonstrance.

But, in truth, he was neither so anxious nor so careful of Mattie as might, perhaps, have been expected. It is doubtful whether the prospect of fatherhood had really added much, or, indeed, anything to his satisfaction. He had everything that he wanted, already. If the new comer should, in any way, interfere with his enjoyment, he was prepared to be jealous even of his own child. Meanwhile, he thought of the future as little as possible. He would have been shocked if

he had known how completely he was becoming demoralized; but he knew very little about himself in these days. His whole life seemed tottering on the verge of change, and his moral nature grew giddy and confused with fleeting glimpses of some indefinable abyss.

Now, he did not press an argument which did not either naturally or frequently occur to him. He came back to the table, and stood beside her, and presently he put his arm round her and drew closer to her. There was something painful in the movement: it was too timid, too deprecatory—something suggestive of the fawning of an unloved dog, whom yet persistent discouragement, though it can intimidate, cannot altogether repress. It was new in Runciman, and, though he did not know this, might have been traced back to a quite definite date. "I wonder if you would

mind very, very much, giving up the bazaar?" he said. "If you knew how glad I should be, how different I should feel altogether, I think you would. Won't you?"

She twisted herself away from him with real anger.

"How can you talk such nonsense!" she exclaimed. "What will you want me to do next, I should like to know? I couldn't get out of it now, if I wanted to, and I wouldn't if I could. So that's all about it."

His face darkened.

"You'd have to, if I said you must."

Mattie opened her eyes a little, for this tone, too, was new; but it did not seem to intimidate her much.

"Well! say it then," she exclaimed, impatiently. "I declare I'd much rather you said it and have done with it, than keep

on fidgeting, and worrying, and changing your mind every day or two like you have been doing for the last I don't know how long!"

But to the infinite misfortune of both of them he did not say it. His mood changed, as it changed now continually; he sighed and turned away. Her manner changed with his.

"Don't mind me, Jesse," she said, almost penitently. "I can't help being cross sometimes now, you know. I don't mean things."

She paused; then, as he took no notice, she seemed to make an effort. It almost looked as if she had to summon up courage to make the move, but she made it. She went up to him, and then she who used never to volunteer a caress put one hand on his shoulder, and with the other gently turned his moody face towards her own,

as one might do to a sulky child. Her manner, of late, had been as new as his. She never now incited him in the way she had done after her return from the Strand, yet neither had she gone back to the almost patiently reluctant submission of the first weeks of her marriage. Now, from time to time, she would force herself, as it were, to a sort of nervous effort of demonstrativeness. It might have seemed that she was growing afraid of her own fear; that some new and secret dread was giving her a horror of that strange constitutional shrinking, even while fear and shrinking were more constantly present to her mind than ever before.

"See," she said, "it's quite true what I was saying; I can't really give up now, it would put everybody out so. But it's only a month, you know; that's not long,

is it? and then there'll be an end of everything."

He softened on the instant; he had her in his arms, held her to his breast, and said, hungrily, as it were: "And then we'll be all comfortable by ourselves again, like we used to be, shan't we? as happy as we used to be at Beulah. You were happy there, weren't you?" But he did not venture to wait for an answer. "We'll just go back to the old times, and everything will be as it was before—just you and me—won't it?"

"Yes," said Mattie; and, indeed, she expected nothing else. If she sighed, the sound was stifled in his embrace.

He kissed the crisp, wandering vine-tendrils of her hair; the whiteness of her brow; the drooping lids which half-veiled eyes in which there was little of the usual sparkle at this moment; kissed her on the

cheeks and lips, not once but many times. At last he released her. "Now, I am going out," he said. But he did not seem to be in any particular haste.

"Oh! I didn't mean that," said Mattie, with some compunction; "it was only the fidgeting in and out I minded. Don't go away for me; you—you can help somehow, I daresay," she ended rather vaguely. There was not perhaps much enthusiasm in her tone, but neither was there any insincerity: he would have been quick enough to detect it. But now he was not to be outdone in magnanimity.

"No; I have been working at that translation all the morning. I want a walk."

He had, at any rate, been sitting over it, and he honestly believed he had been working. But work, now, was a different thing from what it had been in the days

when every given hour had its given task, which could not be omitted or dreamed over without open failure and blame.

"Well—where shall you go?"

"I think I'll go over to the Malay Camp; Andrics moved up there as much as three weeks ago, and I promised to go and see him," said Jesse; and then he really did leave.

Mattie heard the door shut, and she went to the window and watched him down the red dusty straggling street, till he was out of sight; and then she stood a moment still, and for an instant her face grew strangely serious, almost wistful. The next minute she had turned away, and began flitting about the room, tidying up, and humming a waltz tune as she moved; and her eyes were bright, and her lips broke into a saucy smile.

Runciman went on his way rather elate;

for some reason, he fancied that he had obtained a decided victory over himself, though he would have been puzzled to define it. He walked on till, in two or three minutes, he came out upon the main road. And there, just at the opposite side of the street, he saw Westoby talking with a young man. Jesse had never seen Gerald Blake, but it would have been strange, indeed, if he had not had an instinct for him. Besides, Gerald had too much of the air of a visitant from other and very different spheres, to escape notice, even from the uninterested. He had not, indeed, the bad taste to dress London in the colonies; but he really could not help wearing his colonial outfit with a difference. He did not amalgamate with his surroundings.

A 'bus going to Kimberley was in sight; Runciman went to meet it and got in, really to escape the temptation, which suddenly

rushed upon him, to watch, to follow, the movements of this stranger, who yet, to his instincts, was no stranger. A few moments later the 'bus drew up for another passenger: Westoby got in. His companion was already out of sight. Runciman followed his steps in his heart.

It was not often that Westoby condescended to the use of a vehicle of any kind; but, perhaps, to-day he was pressed for time; at any rate, he got in and sat down in the corner next the door beside Jesse. For the last three weeks it had seemed to Runciman as though Westoby pervaded the whole of Kimberley and Beaconsfield. Yet, in point of fact, he had not even seen him very frequently, far less had any intercourse with him. It was by no means Westoby's policy to appear intimate with the young minister; more often than not, when they met, they exchanged no words at

all; when they did, the remarks were of the most commonplace description. Never once by word or manner, had Westoby alluded to the evening in the old kraal; on the other hand, never once had he suffered Jesse to pass him without exacting some kind of recognition, were it only that of a glance. How he managed to enforce this, the younger man could never have said; it remained that, in spite of desire and even resolutions to the contrary, he could no more now refuse the homage of the eye, when the Baas chose to demand it, than he had been able on that dreadful day to refuse the homage of his hand.

Now Westoby took no notice of him, except by an indifferent nod; he sat back in the corner, took a newspaper out of his pocket, and apparently became absorbed in it at once. And now Jesse was anxious to speak—would have been glad of an opening.

Westoby was not going to give him one; he knew the young man would not be able to hold out long, and he deliberately counted on the amount of demoralization he would suffer from yet another surrender. He was amply justified in his expectations. By the time the 'bus was half-way across the short mile of veld which lies between Kimberley and Beaconsfield, Jesse had given in. Westoby saw the moment, and gave him just so much chance of beginning, as was made by laying down the paper to fold it backward.

"Who—who was that you were talking to just now?" began Jesse, with a transparent attempt at indifference. He had not meant to be so abrupt, but his anxiety had no time to waste on preliminaries.

"He scarcely looked as if he belonged to Beaconsfield," he added.

Westoby grinned.

"Well, he don't," he said. "Who is he? Mr. Blake."

Jesse had thought he knew it already, yet when his instinct was thus confirmed, he felt it as a quite new shock.

"What is he?" he asked.

"He? Oh! he's a gentleman," laughed Westoby. "I never could find out that he was anything else much; but you may take his word for it he's that."

The sneer was obviously directed at Gerald, but it was so contrived as to make Jesse yet more uncomfortable. He moved restlessly; he looked back through the open door along the dusty road; but for very shame he would have got down.

"Ay!" said Westoby, meditatively, after a pause; "it's a queer thing how folks run up against each other, from all over the place, as you might say, once they've met. Who'd have thought of us three coming

together again here? him, and me, and your missus."

Like some mortal wound which comes too suddenly—too sharply and unexpectedly to be at once realized by the victim for the thing it is—the words struck upon Jesse's understanding some seconds before the anguish penetrated his heart. He sat and stared a little at Westoby, and felt that something had happened, and did not yet quite comprehend what it was.

"We all came out together in the 'Tartar,' you know, last year. You've never made the trip, have you? It's not much fun for an old stager like me; but I reckon young folks like it—plenty of dancing and high jinks generally, and moonlight, and all that sort of thing, you know, and nobody much to spoil sport. Ay! the young 'uns had good times on board the 'Tartar,' you bet." He understood then. Yet so strong

are the traditions of conventionality, the traditions of a lifetime, even on such a nature as his, that they worked now, even without his will, to keep him from speech, which must have been a cry, to enforce a decent amount of outward composure. It was but for a second or two; almost as Westoby finished speaking, the 'bus stopped to set down a passenger. Jesse got down mechanically—mechanically, rather than from any present exercise of volition, he began to walk in the direction on which he had previously resolved.

Westoby looked after him with a contempt which could almost afford a dash of pity—so little likely was pity to alter any plan of his.

"That's right!" he said to himself. "Just make her a scene or two, till you've frightened her into fairly hating you. Then, when you've got things to a dead-lock, per-

haps I shall have something else to say to you ; you'll listen then, but you must be given your head first, I know. Go your own way, then, till you've had enough of it ; I'm in no hurry. Besides, it won't be long first, anyhow."

Almost unconsciously Runciman walked on. Whatever he might have done, by whatever outbreak of speech or movement he might have relieved or further exasperated himself, if he had been away from public observation, no such outbreak was possible for him here. Here were houses, people : outwardly, he must still restrain himself; inwardly, he was putting no restraint upon himself at all. He did not think much; it could not be called thought. At first he did little but repeat to himself, over and over again : " She never told me she had known him before ! If she had only told me!" Then—once : " *Why* should she not have

told me?" And so, with a rush of despairing passion, he surrendered himself to every suggestion that the experiences of his own temperament could evoke of all that might be implied in Westoby's last words. And then came chaos; in his ears a sound like the storm-wind, before his eyes a mist like blood—and always, through it all, the shadow of Gerald Blake across his threshold; the serene assurance of the face of Gerald Blake turned outwards upon him with a smile.

He was up in the Malay Camp by now, lost, entangled in the spacious labyrinth of bare red plain, over which the square, flat-roofed, red-brown houses of unbaked brick were pitched about anywhere, now in clusters, now far apart, like the tents of a disorderly host. Here and there the dull, rippling grey of a tin tenement, broke the vast monotony of red. A bare-faced sun was drawing near its setting, in a heaven

without a cloud; the whole wide desolation lay steeped, yet scarcely softened, in the lengthening shadows which lay along the dust. Not a tree, not a blade of grass, only here and there the grey-green prickly foliage and yellowish-white blossom of the Mexican thistle—fit flower for the desert—made a sort of mirage mockery of verdure. The ground was strewn with broken bottles, old iron, refuse of all kinds; in one place an old playing-card, cast out among other rubbish, added its own suggestion to the character of the locality, already little ambiguous. Children of every shade of colour—Indians, Malays, natives, half-castes, whites of the poorest, most outcast type—played and screamed, dogs of undiscoverable breeds prowled and barked about the broad irregular streets.

Jesse neither heard nor saw. Presently, in his blind wandering, he stumbled over an old tin which lay across his aimless path,

stumbled so heavily that he nearly fell. The slight physical shock, the instinctive effort to save himself, brought the young man to consciousness; he stood a moment looking round with something of the bewilderment of one suddenly awakened. Some coloured women were standing on the stoep of a slightly better-class looking house than most. He thought they were looking at him curiously, and with the sense that comes at times, after some silent crisis of mental anguish, that the forgotten outer man must have been betraying all unawares something of the tumult that has raged within, he went up to them and, with a vague idea of accounting for himself, asked his way. The brief moments of discussion between them on the subject, gave him yet a little more time to recover himself; when he had his answer he lingered still, in a sort of pause of emotion, fearful of quitting this little rock of

common, everyday life, lest the next step should plunge him again into the blinding, suffocating surge of which the roar was still in his ears; into those bitter waters which, even as he paused, washed up again and again over his soul, threatening every moment to bear him away.

At the door of the next house, a Malay, in his shirt-sleeves, with his red turban-handkerchief bound about his head—a being civilized and respectable (to outward appearance) compared with the natives and half-castes both in feature and costume—stood leaning up against the wall, his arms folded, and that insufferable expression of cynical superiority in his evil eyes and unpleasant smile which seems to characterize the true believer. His eyes were turned idly towards a red mud cottage, standing about a stone's-throw off upon the desert; round its closed door, and its one small window clustered a

little swarm of children, chattering and gesticulating. The young minister looked vaguely at the man, at the children.

"What are they doing?" he asked, to make yet a little silence from thought.

"Ach! they are bad childrens," said one woman, with virtuous indignation.

"Here, 'Hanna, *kom gij saa!*" she screamed to one of her own offspring, in a sudden zeal for propriety. Of course, she was not obeyed; she turned again to Runciman. "A man make his wife dead in that house, last night; the police come at eleven to-day and take away the body, and lock up the house, and the man is in the *tronk* already, they find him in the canteen. But the childrens will look. *Kom gij saa!*" she screamed again. "He come last night and find a man by her in the house, and the man he get away, but the husband he take the chopper for the wood——" and so on, through

an abundance of sickening detail, ending, as a matter of course, with the form: "They was all *baai dronk*, Baas," seemingly considered as sufficient explanation, if not even excuse.

When she had finished, Jesse was standing staring at the house; he could scarcely be whiter than he had been before, but now he was trembling a little. He spoke a few words of such mechanical morality as the subject and the expectations of the narrator seemed to require of one in the dress of a minister, and then he turned away; and now it seemed to him that his head was very clear. Yet he was not conscious of following out any train of thought or reasoning. Only that red mist had cleared away, and in its place, crude and hard, like a materialization of his shapeless thought, stood this coarse brutality of fact: Murder. He went on, looking at the

spectre, not capable, as yet, of treating with it either as friend or foe, only stilled and trembling. And after a while, as by a dreadful fascination, his steps turned back again, led him just past the fatal house. The children hung still around the door; one young ruffian of about fourteen, with his face glued to the window, was shouting out:

"*Allah! ik zie de bloed; daar, langs de kooie!*"

The Malay still stood by his door, smiling and sneering; as Jesse passed, he turned the wicked penetration of his eyes upon him, smiling on as though he had read the young man's heart and found there matter that was not alien. Jesse turned his head aside. He went on shuddering, and scarcely knew whether it was his good or his evil angel had led him hither; whether for warning or for incitement.

For the present, at least, the effect was sobering. By degrees, as he walked back, and the quick dusk gathered, and the mere physical chill of the May evening cooled his blood, reason began to assert itself.

When he got home, Mattie was alone, had been alone a long time. She was just finishing the preparations for tea. They sat down together; he made an attempt to eat, but in a moment or two pushed away his plate, the contents almost untouched. Mattie, looking at him with some surprise, saw him white and seemingly exhausted, his eyes heavy, and, as it were, extinct; now and then the muscles of his face worked nervously. He had not spoken a word since he came in.

"What's the matter, Jesse?" she asked. "Has anything happened? Are you ill?"

"I have a headache," he said, truly enough. He put his elbow on the table,

and dropped his head on his hand, shading his eyes from the glare of the lamp-light. He paused, then went on with a slight shudder: "There has been a horrible murder in the Camp."

"Well, don't tell me about it," said Mattie, quickly; "I'm sure I only wonder there aren't a lot more—dreadful place! But it's no use your making yourself ill over it. You remember it is your night for going to the location; you always come back dead-beat after that, anyhow. You had better eat something."

"I can't," he said, with a gesture of disgust. "Well, give me another cup of tea, then."

He drank it feverishly and asked for more; then sat silent as before. Mattie, from real motives of consideration, refrained from further speech also; she continued her meal with a good appetite.

He sat quiet enough now, and miserable enough too, not knowing how to speak, yet feeling the impossibility of silence. He must speak, must tell her that he knew; yet how should he frame his speech. Should he question, upbraid, accuse? He tormented his throbbing brain in vain; it would not act under his control, only go back with sick persistence to that horror in the Camp. From time to time, he looked at his wife from under the shadow of his hand—so trim, so dainty, so alive—and then he would shudder and close his eyes to shut out another picture, a horrible transformation scene, in which he saw her—how differently! He felt frightened, humbled; yet even the shock had not been able to still the miserable restlessness which drove his soul hither and thither, in defiance at once of reason and of conscience.

Presently the meal was over; it was time to go, and yet he had not spoken.

"Shall you go?" asked Mattie, "if your head is so bad."

"Yes," he said, "I would rather." Then as though he feared to lose again the power of speech before the thing was said, he went on with a sort of hurrying abruptness: "Mattie, you—you never told me that you had known Mr. Blake before."

There was a moment's silence. Mattie's back was turned towards him, and he could not see how she was suddenly scarlet from neck to brow. Perhaps he did not need to see it, the silence was enough; but he was on his guard now, and though it could torture it could not madden him, as it would have done an hour before.

"It is true, then?" he exclaimed; his voice had a certain heart-broken ring in it.

Mattie had turned round; the colour was

still bright in her cheeks; she threw back her head and nerved herself for defiance. "What's true?" she said. "That I knew him? Of course it is. He came out in the same steamer as we did—me and Sarah. Would you like to know about anybody else? I've got the passenger-list somewhere about still, I think. Shall I bring it to you and go through all the names? I could have done it long ago if I'd known you cared."

For a moment they stood looking at each other; but he made no step towards her, either for reconciliation or wrath. Just then passion seemed dead within him—dead of exhaustion; there was nothing but sickness of heart, and shame, and fear—of himself, of everything.

Suddenly he turned away; his hands made a gesture of despair. "Oh! Mattie——" he began; and then no more.

He turned again.

"I wish," he said, despairingly, "Oh! I wish——" and once more broke off. For, indeed, he wished so many things, and all so uselessly. He sighed and shuddered again, and then went out wearily into the night.

He came back, as Mattie had foretold, worn out beyond all power of speech, or thought, or even feeling—only thankful to go to bed. He was asleep at once, with the sleep of utter exhaustion; but Mattie lay long awake, wondering, not for the first time, whether she had not been horribly silly not to have told him at first. She had really meant to do so, on the day of the first meeting; but she had come back more disturbed than she knew, and while she was seeking an opportunity to introduce the subject naturally, the time had passed during which she could have introduced it at all—and an opportunity of this kind, once lost,

is not readily recovered. Thinking also of many things as she stared out into the darkness; Mattie had been learning to think, of late—learning most rebelliously, against her will, escaping from the lesson whenever she could, but learning nevertheless. She slept at last, to dream that Sarah was kneeling beside the bed, weeping—weeping. She woke, and the pillow was, indeed, wet with tears, but they were her own. She asked herself, angrily, what she had been crying about? She was quite happy—quite; and she was not doing any harm.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

After Runciman had got down from the 'bus, Westoby took up his newspaper again, and read on quietly during the few remaining minutes of the journey. From the terminus he made his way to Main Street, and there entered a neat brick building, apparently devoted to the boards of various public companies, and to chambers for individual notaries, conveyancers, auditors, and so forth. Just as he was going in, Dora Solomon came out. It was plain, by the way their eyes met—by the sort of provoking gleam in his, and the sudden flash of annoyance that lighted up the rather sombre depths of hers—

that each knew who the other was. But beyond this, and a haughty up-drawing of her head, Dora took no notice of him. Indeed, she was not, of course, supposed to know him socially; she would have been very glad to have felt that her father knew him as little as she did.

As she walked along, her lips were compressed, and two straight fine lines came out upon her brow between the eyes, making them look more gloomy than usual. She was both vexed and anxious, but neither of her vexation nor her anxiety could she have any confidant. To her father, indeed, she might and would disburden her mind freely on the matter; but she was not of a patient nature—it was her weakest point—and she was getting weary of unavailing remonstrances. Soon she would shrug her shoulders and hold her tongue, and "let things slide," merely making such mental prepara-

tions for a crash as her active managing brain could scarcely refrain from doing, and perhaps actually finding some solace in the mere prophetic exercise, so to speak, of her real genius for organization.

Now she walked on and recovered her temper, did some shopping, and went in to afternoon tea with Alice Thorne, talked over a past ball, and discussed the question of toilette for a coming one, showing much practical capacity, and as genuine an interest as though she had neither knowledge, experiences, nor capacity different from that of the most ordinary specimens of her age and sex. Without affectation, there was nothing that Dora hated worse than to be thought a remarkable woman; there were moments when she almost hated to know it of herself. It seemed sometimes as though the distinct masculine element in this girl's nature was strong enough to weary the fundamental

feminine, while yet it was not always strong enough to sustain it.

Presently, she left, and went on to her own home. It was but a few houses further on : a well-built two-storied brick house, in a garden. There was a deep, rather graceful verandah, both above and below, over which the creepers were already beginning to make a fair show in summer time. Both house and garden looked pleasant and well cared for. Dora saw to that ; the servants in that establishment were well trained.

She opened the gate, and walked up the path slowly ; she was busy with her thoughts again. On the steps, she paused a moment, and looked round, consideringly, at the house itself, at the garden, at the row of pretty detached verandahed houses and well-kept gardens among which it stood, at the bristling grey-green of the great aloe hedge across the road. Dora had little

sentiment in her composition, but so far as she had affection for inanimate objects, she might be said to be fond and proud of her home. And she was saying to herself:

"You are very foolish, father; this is better than the Breakwater—and that will be the end, some day, to a certainty."

Yet the calm of her face was unruffled, or ruffled only by the most passing gleam of impatient disapproval. She was hardened to living in the midst of risk, was hardened even to facing an end which she never disguised from herself; and of mere abstract morality, Dora really had no sense at all on this point: all her considerations with regard to it were purely practical.

Judged by the length of the present interview, at least, she had no need to have been jealous of Westoby's intimacy with her father; he did not stay in Mr. Solo-

mon's office above ten minutes; then he went on to Market Square. It is not to be supposed that Westoby was living in Kimberley without visible means of subsistence. He had a business as transport and forwarding agent: a business, in those days, very fairly remunerative, for, at that time, the railway to Kimberley was barely a year old, extension had not begun to be talked of; moreover, the rush to the new gold-fields was in full swing—conditions all changed now.

His name, and the description of his calling, might be seen above the door, and on the whitened windows of a rather dreary-looking den, sheltering, among auctioneers' premises, wood merchants' and general produce stores, beneath the shabby, dusty, foreign-looking verandah on the south side of Market Square.

He had, also, a branch establishment

at Beaconsfield, which, if it did not do any very extensive business, fulfilled in other ways the purpose of its existence.

In his office he now spent a couple of hours or so ; stayed, in fact, till it was time to close, hearing the report of his clerk as to what had been done in his absence, and transacting business generally. In the evening, he went out again, this time on horseback.

He rode on for some half-mile beyond the point where he had taken the 'bus in the afternoon, to where, slightly aside from the main road, and on the extreme edge of Dutoitspan, a lighted lamp above a doorway indicated a canteen. Less modest indications were afforded by the clamorous voices and the stalwart forms, showing fantastically against the light that streamed through the open door, of a crowd of natives, all in as many various stages of intoxication as could

escape the practical attention of the police. More than one would pass that line before long, to appear next morning among the list of "drunks," which, together with "thefts" and "no passes," go to form the rather monotonous daily work of the resident magistrate.

Westoby passed the door of the native bar, in front of the little crowd who were staggering or huddling just outside, with no more notice than he would have bestowed on a herd of any objectionable but, so far as he was concerned, innocuous animals. Dismounting a yard or two further on, he threw his horse's bridle over the frame of pegs placed for that purpose, and entered the slightly less disreputable-looking division reserved for white customers. A couple of loafer-looking men were drinking there, but the really lucrative business of this canteen was done among the natives; in the other

department the trade was, comparatively speaking, slack.

Behind the counter stood the proprietor, Christian Dreyer, the man whom Westoby had met on board the "Tartar." He was looking slightly bored, and seemed glad to see the new comer.

"Well, Baas," he said, "I began to think you were dead and buried. Step along in behind, won't you? and have a chat."

He called up a barman, from some back region, to take his place, and himself led the way into a room at the back. It was not a very attractive room, being small and close, by no means clean, and very redolent of tobacco and spirits; but both men were equally indifferent to these details. Dreyer went to a sort of chiffonier, the top covered with a black oil-cloth, thick with dust, on which stood a smart cheap vase, one or two

Kaffir curios, and a woman's super-fashionable hat, tawdry with artificial flowers: everything equally smothered in fine red dust. He unlocked the door of the chiffonier, and took out tumblers and a bottle, presumably of a better quality of liquor than the unutterable abominations which he supplied to his quite contented customers. Then he sat down opposite Westoby, at the table, and asked what he had been doing since he saw him last, which appeared not to have been for some much longer time than usual.

Westoby gave him a general sketch of his proceedings, which, if it was not particularly complete, was at least fairly accurate. He was not a man who would ever be hampered by a regard for truth, but neither had he that abstract prejudice in favour of falsehood under all circumstances which distinguished many, perhaps most, of his

associates. He felt the impolicy of it. After nine-and-twenty years of South Africa, he still, as a rule, lied only with a motive, and when there was a reasonable chance of being believed—which was really a distinction in its way. In the present instance there was nothing to be gained by romance, but the value of reticence was undeniable. Dreyer knew quite well that he was being treated to a very abridged and revised edition of Westoby's recent biography, and felt, with regret, that, as usual, in abridged editions, it was the more picturesque and interesting portions that had been left out. But though a large and all-embracing curiosity was one of the canteen keeper's most marked characteristics, the Baas was not a subject who lent himself well to cross-examination; consequently, his hearer resigned himself to making the most of such mere bones of information as were alone vouchsafed to

him. When it was obvious that there was no more to come, there was a pause. Then, whether with a purpose or whether merely to make conversation, Dreyer said :

"I saw the little missionary's wife, Mrs. Runciman, on the market this morning. She's rather a good hand at a bargain."

"Like enough," said Westoby, indifferently.

They talked in Dutch ; for though Dreyer spoke and understood English without actual difficulty, he had never learned to feel at home in it, in the way that Westoby was in most languages that he had had occasion to learn at all.

There had been nothing very encouraging in Westoby's tone, but apparently Dreyer felt impelled to hover yet a little around his subject.

"I wonder how she's getting on?" he said, and his wonder was a question, in tone.

"How should I know?" said Westoby, as before. "I don't visit there."

Dreyer laughed.

"I wonder if she knows you're here?"

"Maybe; she's had as many chances of seeing me about as anybody else. I'm big enough."

This might be facetious, but it was not informing; for some reason the Baas seemed singularly impracticable this evening. But the less he seemed inclined to pursue the subject, the less did the other man seem disposed to relinquish it.

"Ah!" he continued, after a moment as it were of contemplation, "she's a downright pretty little baggage; there's no mistake about that. Do you remember that woman as trapped Hancocks, at the 'Welcome Hotel' last year?" he added with some apparent irrelevance.

"I remember that Hancocks always was

a fool about a petticoat," said Westoby, contemptuously. "He only got what he deserved."

His eyes seemed to turn for a moment towards the hat lying on the chiffonier, and perhaps Dreyer understood something in his voice, for he said with a laugh, as it were, of excuse:

"I know what you're thinking; but I'm not quite such a fool as to do business with one, anyway. It was deuced cleverly done, for all that. But I was thinking how neatly the little party we were talking of would do the trick. She'd be the one to come round a chap; I tell you she could bamboozle him proper. Can't you see her at it?"

This time it was Westoby who laughed; perhaps he could.

"Lord! how she used to carry on with that gentleman-loafer chap; you know who I mean," continued Dreyer. "By the way,

is it true what they're saying—that he's going to marry old 'Jumper' de Jongh's girl? He's 'struck ile' at last, if it is, hasn't he? Do you think it's true?"

"You seem to suppose I'm running all Kimberley," said Westoby, with a touch of impatience. "I know just as much about it as you do—no more nor less. I'm not his boss. All I did was to find him for Rosenthal and Le Sueur, and that lot. Old Rosenthal told me, when I got back this time, that he reckoned he could run the show a bit longer, at a profit, if he could find a secretary as would take well with the women and wouldn't want to know more than was good for him, so being that the needful came in regular. So there was this chap going a-begging; it seemed just a special providence, Rosenthal said. He's a pious old party, Rosenthal is."

They laughed together.

"Well, I thought, when we were coming out, as you rather reckoned on keeping him for yourself, that was all," said Dreyer.

"Maybe I did then; but I saw soon enough that would be no go. He thinks the only chap in the whole blessed universe that knows anything worth mentioning is Mr. Gerald Blake. He don't know what obedience means, and if it came to a pinch he'd throw his own mother overboard to save his own skin. What's the use of a chap like that?"

"Oh!" said Dreyer, rather stupidly; "but if you weren't going to keep on with him, why did you let him have his money back—and you paid him his share of that big haul we made with it, too, didn't you? Why did you do that?" he asked, with the real interest of a disciple. The paths of the Baas' policy were altogether too mysterious for him.

"Why did I do it?" repeated Westoby. "Because honesty is the best policy. Where did you go to school that they didn't teach you that?"

"Pretty much where you did, Baas, I fancy," said Dreyer, with a grin. "But I don't understand."

"That does happen, sometimes, don't it?" said Westoby, sarcastically. "Don't you see, there's many folks as won't bother—that much—about where any money they *make* comes from. But let 'em *lose* it, and they'll ask fast enough, and loud enough, too—and the dickens to pay all round. No. There's questions which, if they ain't going to lead to business, had best not be asked at all; and there's only one way of stopping 'em. It's the cheapest way in the end, you bet."

"Oh!" said Dreyer again. Then, after a pause for meditation, "I see."

"Ay! like the blind man," said Westoby, with a contempt he made no effort to conceal.

But Dreyer showed no signs of resentment; only laughed again. He replenished the contents of the tumblers, and then they sat silent for a while, smoking and drinking. Dreyer seemed to be enjoying his occupation with a disengaged and appreciative mind; but Westoby was thoughtful—his movements were little more than mechanical. Presently he laid aside his pipe for a moment; he bent a little forward, in a manner to enforce attention.

"See," he said, "I've been telling you plenty about my doings." (Dreyer differed from him, but in silence.) "Now I want to hear something about yours. And, first of all, have you been keeping an eye on that missionary chap you were talking about just now?"

It did not surprise Dreyer that his companion should start now, on his own account, a subject to which, when he himself had tried to pave the way for it, he had proved quite unresponsive. For Westoby liked to keep all conversational leads of importance in his own hands; he would not submit to the appearance of being entrapped into a discussion of any kind.

Now, he sat a moment looking at Westoby, with his head a little on one side, and something of the expression of a self-satisfied magpie; but his answer, when it came, did not seem much to the point.

"Don't you know," he said, slowly, "I've been converted?"

"No, I didn't," said Westoby, drily. "*I* only knew you could afford to be. And I'd like a plain answer to a plain question."

"Well, I have been—and he's done it. He's no end set up about me. I'm a very

interesting case, Baas, and I reckon he's keeping his eye on *me.* Will that do as well?"

Westoby had been about to drink; he set down the tumbler again suddenly, and for a second there swept across his face an expression very like disgust. The next instant he had taken his momentarily suspended draught with deliberation.

"If anybody ever says to me that you're not a good, useful, 'all-round man, I'll contradict 'em," he said; then, rather grimly, "*You* don't mind playing it pretty low down, do you?"

Something in his tone forbade Dreyer to accept this remark as a compliment, for which he might naturally have mistaken it."

"Well, Baas," he said, rather sulkily, "you told me to keep an eye on him, and if you don't fancy that way, I reckon you'll

have to invent one yourself. *I* don't know how else to make it out."

But if Westoby had been weak enough, for a moment, to feel a little disgusted, he was by no means so weak as to allow any abstract opinion of the nature of the proceeding to prevent him from taking the fullest advantage of any amount of unscrupulosity in a subordinate.

"No," he said, "that will do well enough. It's as good as any other plan. Better; you thought it out very well," he added, for he knew when commendation was judicious. Dreyer was really very fond and proud of his own little original plan; he had looked forward, for the last fortnight, to the pleasure of telling it to his appreciative commander, and now he had been disappointed. It would not be wise to leave him in his disappointment. He was easily appeased: he was appeased now. Once

assured of this, Westoby relapsed into thought. He pushed back his chair, and began pacing up and down the little room, his head bent, his hand upon his beard, according to his usual habit when considering. Presently he looked up, and round, at Dreyer, who sat watching him with something between curiosity and respect.

"Ay, ay!" he said, "it ought to work well—very well. I suppose he comes to see you, sometimes—it's natural he should; and sometimes you might go to him? Nobody would be surprised at that; not at either?"

"Nobody."

Westoby nodded two or three times, in silence. He took another turn through the room, then he came and stood before the table, opposite Dreyer. He rested both his great hands upon it, and leaned forward

across it till he looked the canteen-keeper very near and straight in the face.

"See here," he said, slowly and markedly; "you think you are only doing this job for me, because I owe that chap a punishment, and I'm bound to let him have it; and you're just lending a hand, for old acquaintance' sake."

"I'd do more than that for you, Baas," said Dreyer. And he really spoke the truth.

"I know," said Westoby. "You have done more; I don't forget. But there's more in this affair than you think for; more than I thought, at first, myself, maybe. There's money in it, and not a trifle either; and I'm not asking any man to do my work for nothing—least of all so old a chum as you."

"Will it be a big thing, Baas?" asked Dreyer, who had as yet merely grasped an idea of some prospective profit, which he

connected but very vaguely with the previous subject of conversation.

"Yes; a very big thing—if I know anything at all. But, mind, it must be *my* work; there must be no fooling around, trying to run this show on your own account. You did me a good turn once, when you risked something by it, too. I've just said I don't forget that; but there's such a thing as overdrawing an account. You understand? This is *my* affair, and I don't hold with other folks bossing my shows."

"I don't know what this one is, yet," said Dreyer, with most unaffected bewilderment.

Westoby stood up straight; he looked at nothing in particular, and his next words came in a matter-of-course tone which he seemed to try not to make impressive.

"Well, I'm going to run that missionary for the business. He's going to be my agent."

If Dreyer's crop of light harsh hair did

not stand on end at this announcement, it was the only sign of amazement that was wanting in him.

"He—is going—to buy—for you?" he gasped. "To buy—diamonds?"

"That's so," said Westoby; and if he had held the bond, signed and sealed to this effect, of the man to whom he had not yet even broached the subject, were it ever so cautiously, he could not have spoken with more confidence. He condescended to a little more detail.

"See here," he said, and his manner changed suddenly, "I'm watched."

Dreyer looked at him, with a sort of sympathetic shock; he whistled—a long low whistle of respectful condolence. Westoby had flung himself into a chair, his face was darkened as if for one of his outbursts of passion; the other could hear him swearing, under his breath, as it were. But the storm

passed off with no more than these mutterings of distant thunder.

"It will blow over, after a bit," he said, calmly enough, at the end of a minute; "but, of course, I shall have to quit business till it does. That's what I went to tell old Solomon this afternoon—that I shan't be able to run any of his stuff just yet awhile; if he wants to get any of it across, he'll have to find someone else to do it. I've got to lie by for a bit. But he said he'd sooner hold on to it till he could send it by my boy as usual."

Dreyer opened his eyes considerably.

"That's the light-heartedest old party ever I came across," he said; "he don't seem to care what risks he runs. Hold on to it! why, he must have a young mine on his premises already. I wonder he don't leave the things about on his dressing-table; he might nearly as well."

Westoby shrugged his shoulders.

"It's no affair of mine," he said. "I only spoke of it by the way. But, for me, for us, there's going to be a chance pretty soon that it would be a sin and a shame to lose. I've just found out that Mohetsewa is on his way to get work here. You've heard me talk of that chap? he's about the cutest thing in niggers, in the light-fingered line, that you'll find between this and the Zambesi. You'll say there are some here now that are no fools at it; but the best of 'em is just a baby compared to him. And I have him under my thumb. He'll get us more stuff in a week than any other nigger on the Fields will do in a month—and safer, at that. But I can't do any business just now, myself. Well! here's a chap with a character—a chap as I promised to find work for. Now, do you see at all?"

Apparently Dreyer did; delight and

admiration had been broadening and brightening on his face with every word.

"Why, Baas, with a character like that chap's—why! there's nothing, *nothing*, one couldn't venture on at first!" He paused, reviewing the boundless possibilities of such a condition—such a legal condition. "Did *you* ever have a character, Baas?" he asked, with interest.

"Never," said Westoby, promptly. "I made tracks from the workhouse at ten years old without waiting to ask for one. Likely I shouldn't have got it if I had.—But you understand now—*everything?*"

Beyond this emphasis he made no allusion to his implied threat of a few moments back. He never repeated a warning.

"Yes; everything," said Dreyer; and the other was quite satisfied. He rose to go.

"But do you really think," said Dreyer, still amazedly, "that you can make your missionary do this? and for nothing?"

"Who said for nothing? Of course not. He will get his commission on every job that's done, and his share of the profits from any cash of his own he may put into the concern."

"Really?" said Dreyer, incredulously.

"Really," repeated Westoby, sarcastically. "For nothing! You don't suppose any chap is going to sell his soul for nothing, do you?" he said, and laughed more harshly than usual.

Dreyer made no answer; even if he had not been mentally and morally incapable of grasping that aspect of the affair—which he was—he was, at the moment too much absorbed in another view of the case to have ears, or thoughts, for anything else.

"Well!" he exclaimed, with the voice of one giving up a problem. "His share—and a commission—and no risks worth thinking of—and you to steer him through what there are, for your own sake! And you call that punishing a fellow! Lord!" he exclaimed, with genuine fervour, "I only wish someone would take and punish *me* that way—that's all!"

Westoby looked at him rather strangely.

"I believe you," he said, and laughed again. "But you ain't *him*. And I tell you," he went on, and there was something in his tone that carried conviction, "I tell you, that, before I've done with *him*, he'll wish he had never been born."

## CHAPTER XIX.

"THERE'S a letter for you, Sam," said Sarah Arkwright.

She did not hint to him, even by so much as some trifling urgency of tone, that he should make haste to open it. Yet, during the hours between the arrival of the letter and Sam's return to dinner, she had never had occasion to enter the room where it lay upon the table, without giving a glance at it, and had never glanced at it without a rush of such real heart-hunger as, for that quiet nature, amounted almost to passion.

Sam, whose correspondence was neither extensive nor interesting, showed little excite-

ment. It was not till he had done ample justice to his dinner, that he took up the letter lying beside his plate.

"From Kimberley," he said. "Runciman, I suppose. What can he want?"

He opened it; a little note dropped out from the larger enclosure, but he did not notice it. Sarah's hands trembled a little for the touch of it, but she did not ask.

The letter was not a long one, but it seemed long enough to contain a certain amount of vexation for Sam. He looked across at Sarah; it seemed, for a moment, as though he grudged his news.

"Well, what has he got to say for himself?" asked Mr. Glasse. He did not take much real interest in the doings or prosperings of the late schoolmaster, but news was not so abundant in Beulah but that he was glad to hear anything, simply as news.

"He hasn't anything to say about himself. They want the missus to go up there," said Sam, rather reluctantly.

Such a light came into Sarah's face as could scarcely have escaped the notice of even an uninterested observer. If the poor girl had quite realized that swift sudden change in her looks, she might have reproached herself even with that, as a symptom of a desire too eager to be allowed a disciplined heart. But she did not realize it, any more than she observed how her husband's face seemed to grow colder, as he caught the look in hers. The next moment the light had faded; she looked anxious.

"Mattie!" she exclaimed. "Oh! Sam, is she ill?"

"He doesn't say so. He says she has seemed nervous and upset these last two or three days, and she does nothing but fret

for you, and if you could be spared, he should be very thankful to you for coming. Oh! he says she was writing, too; there, you can see for yourself." He found the enclosure, and tossed both letters across to his wife. "I guess there's nothing much to worry about, old lady," he said, in a tone between consolation and impatience.

There was really nothing in Runciman's letter beyond what Sam had said. It was composed and expressed even with something of pedagogic stiffness, and was quite uncharacteristic; the most that might have been suspected from it was that the writer had been feeling rather worried. As for Mattie's enclosure, it was reassuring rather than otherwise. It seemed to have been written in excellent spirits; it had certainly been written in great haste—a little scrawled, smudged effusion, with no information, but a great deal of affection and much entreaty

to the same effect as Jesse's. From beginning to end there was neither statement nor explanation of any kind.

Sarah had it by heart in a few moments, yet she referred to it again and again in the course of the afternoon, trying to hear Mattie's voice in every word, her heart beating quicker with the hope of hearing it again, not merely in imagination, so much sooner than she had ventured to expect. The matter had not, indeed, been settled at the dinner-table, the time was not long enough to enter upon a discussion to which, moreover, Sam seemed but little inclined. Yet she felt small fear of a refusal; her secret thought, indeed, was that her temporary absence would be a relief to all parties.

In fact, of late, domestic relations had been growing more and more strained. The card-playing story had got wind, somehow—

of course, not without embellishments—and there had been rather a fuss. Mr. Reeves had been made the scapegoat, for (whatever the ladies of the settlement might have felt about it) none of the men, to whose lot the task must have fallen, were disposed to encounter Mrs. Reeves in an embassy of rebuke. To avoid a scandal among the flock, it was not allowed to come to a case of public censure; but a deputation consisting of the minister (not willingly, but of necessity) and two or three of the principal elders waited upon Mr. Reeves, in a sort of semi-official manner, and reduced him to a state of nervous agitation sufficient to satisfy the demands of justice. Sam, by common consent, was left to the minister, who was no Brutus, and satisfied his conscience with a very mild remonstrance indeed.

The whole affair, so far as that household

was concerned, might have blown over quietly enough, if the same evening had not chanced to be that appointed for the monthly meeting for prayer and the consideration of affairs by the church officers and heads of departments. The minister presided, of course, and Sam, as head of the waggon-works department, was bound to a most unwilling attendance.

Now Beulah had its faults—the faults of all little communities ; but, on the whole, it was a good-natured, kindly and liberal (the heads of some settlements said too liberal) little place. The minister was popular, Sam even more so ; the meeting, as a whole, then, assembled that evening with a sort of tacit understanding that bygones should be allowed to be bygones, and no references made to the unfortunate occurrence which had, certainly, been amply discussed already. But to be efficacious, an understanding of

this sort must be universal; merely general, it is of no use at all. There was present, officially, the superintendent of the shoemaking department (the settlement supplied all the *veld-schoon* required for home consumption). This man was, like most shoemakers, argumentative and, by gift of nature, cantankerous; the sort of person who, in the Established Church, would have been, chronically and wherever his lot might have been cast, an aggrieved parishioner. He had no notion of burying little unpleasantnesses that had not, in his opinion, been half worried. Discussion might be forbidden him, and was; he being not important and universally disliked. But, unfortunately, there was, on this occasion, another medium of expression open to him; no power on earth could interfere to prevent the ventilating of his sentiments in prayer. Begun, no doubt, in all sincerity of charity and godly interest, it

cannot be denied that extempore intercessory prayer, made in public, is liable to almost intolerable abuse; it may become the vehicle for personalities so outrageous that they would not be endured for an instant in any other form. Brother Simpson had it out on this occasion. He began by a reference, the least ambiguous, to the sin of Eli; then, after a rather confused passage, in which he was vaguely understood to compare the minister's house or household to Zoar, spared awhile for the sake of one righteous, he openly requested the meeting to return thanks for the steadfastness of Sister Sarah Arkwright under a recent temptation, praying that her example might be blessed in the quarter where she would most wish it.

Even Sam kicked a little, mentally, and Mr. Glasse was furious. Forbidden by every consideration of position and decency to express anything of his feelings at the

meeting, he nursed them in silence till he got home, when, as the two men sat together over their pipes, he relieved his mind by pouring out all the vials of his sympathy with Sam, and of his wrath with Brother Simpson. Made cautious by past experience, he did not at first venture to include his daughter-in-law in his animadversions, though it was towards her more hotly than towards anyone else that the fire of his anger burned.

"I can't bring myself to think as your wife would really thank him for making such a show of her at your expense: a woman must feel that it don't sound much to her credit to be stuck up that way—even," he glanced furtively at Sam, as though to see how far he might venture, "even if she *do* think much the same herself."

"Sarah had nothing to do with it; don't be a fool, dad," said Sam. But though he spoke impatiently, the minister did not fail

to notice that there was less resentment in the tone than he could once have had reason to expect.

"Oh! I'm not hinting anything," he said, deprecatingly. "She's a saint—you said so long ago. As for your poor old dad, he's only flesh and blood, and it goes a bit hard with both to have to hearken to such things as was said this evening. But, maybe, saints wouldn't mind; maybe they love a man the better for being a bit of a sinner. I can't say."

Sam sprang up from his chair; he thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and began to walk up and down the room with a sort of fling—evidences of disturbance very unusual with him.

"I can't say, either," he exclaimed, "but I'm blest if it looks much like it!" He gave a rather angry little laugh. "I think the thing was never made that will fetch

some people. Anyway, that's not just the kind of loving a man looks for in his wife. She thinks a sight of my soul already, Heaven bless her! Simpson was right enough there; say, dad, why won't she love *me?*"

The old man made no answer; all the emotions that go to make up senile love and jealousy—and such passions exist—were struggling for the mastery.

"Why don't she, dad?" repeated Sam.

He had stopped in his walk and stood opposite Mr. Glasse's chair, putting his question with a sort of half-humorous, half-impatient lightness of manner which could not disguise the trouble that lay beneath.

The minister put out a hand that trembled a little with age, and more, just now, with feeling stronger than beseemed his years, and his answer was no answer at all.

"*I* love you, lad," he said; "I have loved you a long time."

He was old and he was agitated, with a sense that he had come to a crisis in that long battle for the sovereignty in his son's affections; his voice, like his hand, was tremulous, and Sam saw a glistening in his eye which touched him strangely. His hand went out to meet the minister's with a grip which, with the twinge of physical pain, brought a thrill of immeasurable satisfaction to the old man's heart; and for once Sam did not laugh away his sentiments, for, indeed, he was not happy.

"Ay, dad," he said, "*you* have never found me so hard to cotton to, have you? I'm not too bad a lot for you?"

"I wouldn't have you different, Sam, not to be a archangel," said the minister, with a defiance at once of propriety and grammar which was not without a soothing effect on

his hearer. He laughed, much more like his old self.

"Oh! come, dad," he said, "go slow! Blest if you haven't forgotten Eli already!"

And now, the minister could afford to chuckle. It had been an insult when Sam had been aggrieved at it; it was a joke now that Sam could take it as one.

It was the last direct word said on that subject, then or afterwards. But it was not the last of the minister's diplomacy, by any means. He did not, indeed, discuss Sarah with her husband. But he had a way of meeting the slightest symptoms of annoyance or disappointment on Sam's part with a look or gesture conveying a tacit assurance of such mutual understanding as did not require to be put into words. Indeed, had Sam been allowed to put these little grievances into words, they must have stood at once confessed for the phantoms they were.

As it was, he was allowed to feel without being allowed to fight them; and with all this sympathy and affection was more really unhappy than he had ever been in his life.

Upon the whole party, in this mood, came the letter from Beaconsfield, offering the chance of a break. After all, the husband and wife might never have come to a decision, if they had been left to themselves. Sarah was too tenacious of every extreme point of duty, not to shrink from forcing his hand by any display of the eagerness she felt to be gone. Sam, divided between a sort of resentfulness of the hope she could not disguise, and a foreboding of some blank, worse even than that of disappointment, which lay in wait for him with her absence, could not bring himself to consent without raising difficulties which she felt it wrong to combat with any vigour.

"I suppose you're just wild to go, aren't

you, old lady? You'd think me a selfish brute to keep you from her?"

"I have never thought you selfish, Sam," she answered, gently.

"Come, that's something," he said, not without meaning. But she either did not see, or would not accept, the challenge.

"There's really no sense in it," he went on, watching her, as it were. "I promised, when she left, you should go to her in October. There's reason in that; but this is just a fidget. Like enough, by the time you get up, she'll have forgotten she wanted you."

"Very well, Sam."

He laughed, a little impatiently.

"What's the use of saying that? You can't help letting me see you would just be breaking your heart."

She shook her head.

"I don't think my heart breaks very

easily," she said, like one that knows; "not so easily as all that. I should be sorry—but I daresay you are right—it is just a fancy."

"Do you really care very much about going?" asked Sam, scarcely knowing what answer he wanted.

If, then, she had allowed the cry of her heart to find utterance! if, with tears, she had cried out aloud, "Yes, yes! let me go! I am starving here, by inches—starving, heart and soul. Let me go where there is somebody that loves me, and that I love; somebody that can understand! Why should you torture me like this, when it is nothing to you whether I go or stay?—when you would be happier without me—you and him?" If she would only have done this! There are errors of reticence, as well as errors of speech — and scarcely can words, the hastiest, the most to be

lamented, make more for misunderstanding than can an ill-timed silence. But she would not even listen herself to this importunate wail; freedom even of secret speech was not for that still too rebellious heart of hers. As for outward expression, ever since that one never-to-be-forgiven outbreak, she had put a watch on it more severe than ever; no amount of repression could be more than she required.

"Do you, old lady?" said Sam, with a certain touch of anxiety which he could not repress.

"Of course, I would like to go," she said; "it's natural, isn't it? But you needn't be afraid I shall fret, if you really want me to stay. You come first, of course, always."

And there was his chance; but, as principle had tied her tongue, so shyness fettered his; the dread of sentiment in cold

blood; the sense of raw juvenility which sometimes seized him when she was most reasonable and self-contained. He looked at her for a moment, with an expression she could not interpret; then he said:

"Well, we needn't settle it this minute; the governor will be wanting his tea, and it is too late for post to-day, anyhow."

So, after all, it was the minister who settled it. He seemed in better spirits and temper than he had been for months past. The first thing he said was:

"Well, are you pretty well through with the packing? I'm told it's a long job with the ladies always."

That he should address himself to Sarah, and address her amiably and jocosely, was sufficiently surprising to paralyze her powers of speech for the moment. It was Sam who answered:

"We hadn't quite made up our minds

about the thing, dad; I was thinking we couldn't spare her, just for a fad."

"I'm surprised at you, Sam," exclaimed the minister, with virtuous indignation. "*I* should never forgive myself if I were to be that set on my own comfort as to keep Sarah back, things being as they are. It may matter more than you seem to think for. It's like enough poor little Mrs. Runciman must often feel the need of a friend; and you were more than just that to her, too," he ended, turning again to Sarah.

There was enough genuine good-will in this not very disinterested speech to conciliate the poor girl, who was willing enough to be conciliated, though the good-will was all for Mattie, and not at all for herself. In fact, Mattie had always been rather a favourite with the old man. She had taken a fancy to him from the first, and, mutually

flattering, they had mutually liked each other. In a very mild way, he was rather sorry when she went, and, still, when he thought of her at all, it was with real kindness.

Sarah answered with a look so grateful that Mr. Glasse's conscience, little sensitive towards her as it was by this time, pricked him somewhat.

"It's very natural," he added, "and it speaks well for both of you. To be sure, Sam, you must let her go."

And so it was arranged, though Sam was vexed and puzzled, and could not read between the lines of this vigorous support in the way that his wife could. But since she had known for months past that the minister would rejoice to be rid of her, even for ever so short a time, it hurt her feelings very slightly; now, too, she felt she might allow in her heart a little liberty of joy. Sam

heard her singing softly to herself next evening, as she moved about laying the table; she was humming some little school-song that had been a favourite with Mattie at Marston. But he had never heard her sing over her work before in all the months she had been his wife; he could interpret the sign, and did so with a bitterness of which he had scarcely known himself capable. Sam did a good deal of growing in those forty-eight hours; it was rather a painful process, and the emotion which seemed to grow fastest was a sort of pride, hitherto unknown to him. From the moment he overheard Sarah's singing (which he answered on the spot by an outburst of the liveliest whistling he could summon up at a moment's notice), he not only suppressed every sign of regret at her departure, but assumed a cheerfulness on his own account which her eyes were

not love-clear enough to recognize as feigned.

In the sunset of the next day Sarah, with her husband to drive her, was seated in the cart which was to take her to the Paarl station in time for the night train. Mr. Glasse stood on the stoep to see her off. He had grown quite cordial at the last; had even trotted back to the house himself to fetch another rug for her, for winter was already beginning to make itself felt, and the night journey across the mountains would be cold enough. He had even kissed her before she took her place in the cart; it was the first time since the formal salute with which he had welcomed her when she had crossed his threshold as a bride.

"Good-bye, my dear, and God bless you," he said. "Take care of yourself."

It was the merest formula of benediction, such as, perhaps, he had heard in England

from lips that had been old when he was a boy, and which came to his, by a sort of association, now that he in his turn was old. But Sarah was glad afterwards to remember he had said it.

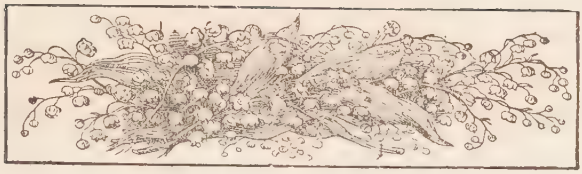
The last she saw of him, round the baffling hood of the cart, he was still standing on the stoep, beneath the oak-trees, bare now for the most part, or clothed sparsely with dead brown leaves, rattling with the extremity of dryness. He had stooped to examine some plant in one of the tins—a plant dead now like the leaves ; his head was bare, a slanting ray of sunshine, breaking through the branches, turned his uncovered hair to silver ; even as she looked a faded leaf fell upon it. It was evening, and it was autumn. She did not know what sudden passion of relenting, of forgiveness, even of self-reproach, seemed to compress her heart and well up into her eyes in tears.

Sam slept at the Paarl; it was too late to get back after he had seen Sarah off. He rose while the darkness of morning was not in any way to be distinguished from the darkness of night, and by the light of the setting stars drove home alone. The late dawn was grey upon the mountains when the trees that shrouded the settlement came shadowily into sight; by the time he had put up the horses, the peaks to the east stood purple and sharp against a faint far flush of rose; those to the west were already bathed in the gold of a new day. The house-door was open; the servant-girl was sweeping on to the stoep some dead leaves which had drifted into the *voor-kammer*. Sam asked for coffee; it was strange to him, now, that he should need to ask for any little comfort. At the sound of his step and voice the old minister came out of his room: he was but just dressed. He came

up to Sam, and grasped his hand with a vigour which said more than words.

"It's just like old times again, ain't it, lad?" he said, with a sort of senile chuckle.

"Just," said Sam—and drew away his hand a little quickly. Then looked round the room, and felt it empty: felt the emptiness of the whole house; and knew from the bottom of his heart that he had spoken falsely—that the old times were dead beyond hope of resurrection; that nothing would ever be quite the same again.



## CHAPTER XX.

If there had been nothing in Runciman's letter explanatory of his statement regarding Mattie's sudden attack of nervousness, there were certain reasons for reticence. The shock which had been the beginning of it could not, indeed, be said to have been exactly his fault; but she had been where he scarcely should have allowed her to go, and the unfortunate result could only have been possible in a condition of things which would not have redounded much to his credit as a minister, if it had come to the knowledge of the authorities at headquarters.

After that first informal quarrel, there had been a sort of informal reconciliation. Nothing had been said on either side, whether of apology or of explanation. Gerald Blake's name was not only never mentioned again, it was never even alluded to—a most transparent hypocrisy in both, but which yet served to smooth matters over for a time.

When reason had to some extent returned, as it had done by the following morning, Jesse could not but admit that there had been nothing in Mattie's conduct with respect to Blake's visits that need bear an evil construction, he could not accuse her, in this, of the faintest attempt at concealment; while, with regard to the past, he was now capable of considering that, if Westoby had been Mattie's fellow-traveller, so had Sarah Arkwright. The testimony of the whole tone and tenor of her manner both to

Mattie and to himself, of Mattie's manner to her, was, at least, as well worth taking into consideration as were Westoby's insinuations. All this his reason told him; whether the logic convinced his passions as well as, for the time, it succeeded in silencing them, is another question.

It must be owned that circumstances so far helped him as that no fresh cause of excitement came in his way just now. Westoby was away, this time on legitimate business, having gone down to a sale of mules and waggons on some farm in the colony; and one result, at least, of Mattie's meditations had been a resolution that Gerald Blake should not come to the house again, and she kept it. She could scarcely be said to have been frightened by Jesse's manner after the discovery; she really was not able to understand the violence of the forces with which she played. But, in fact,

she did not wish or mean to exasperate him, to do anything further than amuse—perhaps distract — herself; under all the circumstances, anything else would have been incredible. She may not have been striving after any very high ideal of right; but nature itself had given her a safeguard against even the contemplation of serious wrong. Fitfully, indeed, she made, at this time, quite unwonted efforts to be good in many ways in which she had grown careless enough of late. For some days, too, after the night of their quarrel, she really tried hard to make her husband happy. If she could not quite succeed in that, she succeeded, at least, in enslaving him more than ever.

Then, one day, she took a fancy into her head. One evening, after tea, she asked Jesse to wait a minute while she put on her hat and cape; she wanted to go with him to the native service he was accustomed

to hold on that night. The proposal was sufficiently amazing, nor did he show any enthusiasm in seconding it.

"You won't like it," he said, demurring; "you know you don't like even to pass a native in the streets."

"Oh, I'm going to get over that," she said. "It's silly, isn't it, to be afraid? After all, they *are* people—just like us. It is silly, isn't it?" she repeated, almost as if she wanted the assurance that it was.

But this was a subject he cared little to discuss. He made no answer; only remonstrated further:

"I really think you had better not come; there'll be nothing but men there."

"It'll be all right if you take me," said Mattie; and, indeed, in spite of her last remark, she had so little real sense of any common humanity with the natives, that the accident of sex in them affected her

scarcely more than it did in the lower animals. "I want to see what it's like," she went on, fretfully. "I don't know why you should always seem to think I don't care about your work. Besides, I tell you, I don't want to go on being afraid; I want to get used to them."

"Don't you think there might be better ways?" he asked, helplessly.

"No. Of course, I shouldn't like to go with you to the locations, to the heathen ones; but these are all civilized Christians that you have in the chapel on these nights, aren't they?"

"No; these are only preparing for baptism," said Jesse, with a gleam of hope that this might discourage her.

"Oh, well, going to be; it's all the same thing; they'll be respectable, at any rate." Jesse's face betokened no certainty whatever on this point, but he did not like to express

a doubt which ought not to have existed. "It will be much better to begin with the respectable ones; then, by-and-bye, I shall get used to the others—perhaps. I don't *think* I mind them as much as I did," said Mattie. "Now, I won't be a minute getting ready."

And, as usual, he submitted, equally against his judgment and his inclination; the time had long passed when he could have summoned up resolution to forbid her anything, however contrary to what he felt to be advisable or even proper.

If Mattie had begun to repent of her determination, even before she came to the end of their short walk, she made no sign. When they reached the little iron building on the edge of the veld, she held her husband's arm rather tight, but put a good face on the matter, and walked up to the top with him, bravely enough, though she did not

look about her. He put her into a chair, well out of the way of the body of the congregation, took up his own position, and the service began with a hymn, given out line by line.

When Mattie had got over the mingled odour of paraffin and native which, on her first entrance, seemed to take possession of every sense she had, she summoned up courage to look about her. Civilized and respectable! Some, indeed, wore decent suits enough, and looked clean, human, intelligent, and even devout. But of a large proportion of the congregation, Mattie's description had certainly not been prophetic. Of these, some were attired in costumes which, if rather original in design, were at least sufficient in extent. One individual evidently fancied himself immensely in an old soldier's weather-beaten tunic, and a kilt of brilliant-patterned cotton handkerchiefs

worn over a pair of old brown trousers. Another boasted not only a kilt, but a jacket of the same elegant material; his arms, legs, and feet were bare, and he wore elaborately worked brass wire bangles round his arms and ankles. But there were others who had not hesitated to come in the congenial simplicity of a blanket only; the draping was in no case classical, and not always entirely satisfactory even from other than an artistic point of view.

Now Runciman had no business to have allowed this. He knew quite well that in no settlement of the community anywhere would such a thing have been tolerated. These were not by way of being raw heathens, of whom all that was required was that they should listen anyhow. As he had said, these were all enrolled catechumens; the most elementary proof of the sincerity of their intentions was, at least, that they

should come to their place of worship clean and, as Mattie put it, respectable. Jesse knew this, and felt an occasional twinge of conscience on the subject; but every time he forgot again, nor was this the only point in which his discipline was very defective. Yet as a schoolmaster he had had a good report as a disciplinarian. But here he had no superior in the place; for the first time in his life, he was left entirely to his own sense of responsibility; and the plain truth is that many things were done and permitted which would have been very different if he had had to work under fear of inspection. In fact, he was failing; yet failing in a way which deceived even himself with a show of what might be called statistical success. Something, perhaps, was due to inexperience, but unfortunately a great deal more to an ever-growing indifference to everything that was not immediately

remunerative in excitement. He dared not live without excitement now.

The class went on; some kind of catechizing succeeded the hymn. Mattie sat and stared at the rows of black faces—some dull, some cunning, some more than potentially bestial, with the dulness, the cunning, the bestiality of the savage; if there were better expressions, as no doubt there were, she, blinded by nervous horror, was in no condition to discern them. She watched the bearing, the gestures, the whole indescribable something that marks the even much more than half-reclaimed native; she listened to the voices, the quality as indefinite, as unmistakable for anything European as all the rest. She looked at Jesse; he was giving an address now, speaking alone; his voice, always rather curious in *timbre* when he was roused, seemed all at once to receive its natural interpretation. It was to such

speech that such tones should be wedded. He stood looking over his congregation; was it altogether Mattie's fancy that seemed to trace, more and more as his excitement increased, a something—it was as if the veil of the generations were thinning, rolling back. A great horror of nervousness began to creep over Mattie. For all the cold outside, the ill-ventilated building was hot and close; she began to feel faint, at once with terror and physical oppression. And then came the climax. Some movement among the rows suddenly revealed to her a thing so ghastly that stronger nerves than hers might have owned to a momentary shock, the first time of seeing it. A face whose blackness was scarred and gashed with livid stripes; the eyes peered horribly out of wide, pallid circles, beneath which the lower part of the face seemed to vanish in darkness. It was horrible; a moving corpse, animated out of

corruption by some evil power which still glittered in the eyes that rolled in those livid sockets. Mattie was not in the habit of studying such natives as she could not help seeing in her daily walks, with any attention; and it chanced she had never before seen one got up artistically with yellow ochre. This, indeed, was the whole explanation; that he should have ventured to come to such a place so got up, required, perhaps, explanation of another kind, but that must have been demanded of Jesse Runciman.

She did not scream, simply because she was too frightened; she sat, paralyzed, one hand stretched out instinctively towards Jesse, in a sort of appeal for protection, but her eyes fixed, riveted on that horror in the crowd. At last, a little moan forced its way between her parted lips. Jesse heard it, and turned round. Her face startled him scarcely less than the native

had startled her. She could not speak, only turned her hand slowly, and pointed down the chapel. His eyes followed her sign, and then, of course, he understood. He interrupted himself for a second to whisper, hastily: "It's only paint;" whereupon, in the mingled absurdity and ecstasy of relief, she broke down in a sudden storm of hysterical tears and laughter. There was nothing for it but to bring the class to an abrupt conclusion, and, horribly ashamed and annoyed—more, to do him justice, with himself than with her—that was what he did. She was not long in recovering herself after that, but was trembling too much to walk. He had to take her home in a cart.

She spent a disturbed night, sleeping only to wake starting and screaming continually. He had plenty of opportunity for renewing his terribly futile resolutions that

he really would look after things a little better. She persisted in rising at the usual time; but, half-an-hour later, he found her sobbing in the passage, her hand on the kitchen door, which she had not courage to open, because Sixpence (the Kaffir house-boy) was in there, and she could not bear to come near him, to see him; he reminded her of that dreadful man—she should never forget him, never.

Jesse, who, by this time, was considerably ashamed of that dreadful man, soothed her as well as he could, though with little success, till he undertook that Sixpence should be kept out of her sight till she felt she had quite got over her fear of him; he should go for a holiday; they would get in some white woman or Cape girl to help for a week or so, till she had got over her fright; she would not mind a Cape girl?

So, by degrees, she was comforted and

got through the day pretty well, though looking strangely white and scared. It was not a common expression with Mattie, yet she could look most piteously scared. But, with the coming of night, the terror seemed to increase tenfold: not even the lamp-light could dispel it; Jesse could do nothing with her. Presently, she began to cry for Sarah; and so it came to pass that, not, indeed, at once, and not without reluctance, Jesse was driven at last, when this sort of thing had been repeated for two or three evenings, to write the request which they had received at Beulah.

Not without reluctance. He did not ask himself why. In old days, though far from appreciating her at her true worth, he had yet taken a somewhat condescending, yet real pleasure in Sarah's society. Now, he felt a certain secret uneasiness at the remembrance of the high spiritual levels on

which she was used to walk; for, so slightly as he ever cared to examine himself now—ever since that day on the veld, which had left him with pride alone to do the work of mortally-wounded self-respect—he still could not feel that he was really going on well; that his life, outwardly unimpeachable, rested on any satisfactory basis. He shut his eyes to this; hid it from himself in every way he possibly could. But there was left a nameless fear that he might, in some way, betray himself. With his temperament, he could but be, by nature, a poor dissembler; by means of constant excitement in other directions, he could and did make himself forget troubles, passions, temptations, but he had little power of disguise whenever he was consciously in their grasp. He had not yet begun to work under a master who had such discipline in store for him as he had never even imagined.

## CHAPTER XXI.

SARAH came; and, for the first hours, Jesse's fears vanished. "Peace be to this house, and to all that are in it:" the benediction seemed to breathe from her very presence, to brood, for a brief while at least, over this home where there had been little enough of peace of late. She was, too, so undisguisedly happy to be there, that she shed a sort of reflected happiness all round her; it was flattering that she should be so glad, and that alone would have been soothing. If Sam could have seen Mattie's welcome at any rate, he would not have found it wanting. She clung to her friend, kissing

her again and again, scarcely willing to let her out of her sight for a moment. Even when, at Mattie's own entreaty, Sarah had gone to lie down after two very indifferent nights in the train, even then the little hostess could not keep away altogether: she would open the door softly now and again, putting her head in for a moment, as though to assure herself that Sarah was actually there.

The first day of the visit really left nothing to be desired from anyone's point of view. That evening, which was one of those Jesse spent at home, Mattie, for the first time since her fright, did not keep up a constant nervous wandering of the eyes to every corner of the room, especially towards the doors and window. They all three sat and talked; there was nothing remarkable in the conversation, but the whole tone and atmosphere of that evening

was indescribably different to anything either husband or wife had known for long weeks. Perhaps they had never known it at all, that atmosphere too rare for the breathings of passion, too still for the flutterings of frivolity.

The next day there was one of the committee meetings, more frequent now as the bazaar drew near. Mattie went off early in the afternoon, before the time that she was required to be there; she said she had some shopping to do first. She did not ask Sarah to accompany her, for the sufficient reason that she fully expected to meet Gerald Blake in the course of her shopping expedition: she had not exactly made an appointment, but she would have been much surprised if he had failed to appear. So she contented herself with commending Sarah to Runciman for entertainment.

"Take her round and show her the place and some of your people, and that. She will like that ever so much better than going after wicked worldly things with poor me; won't you, Grannie, dear?" she said, and smothered any possible answer in a hug.

Then she tripped away, and there was an end of Jesse's peace of mind for the next four-and-twenty hours at the least. When she was gone he made not even so much offer of seconding her suggestion as to Sarah's amusement as the commonest civility required. He remained standing by the window, and Sarah, looking up for a moment from her sewing, noticed how worn and almost haggard his face appeared, seen thus in the full light. She did not wonder at this; how natural that the increased burden of responsibility—that responsibility, which even in prospect

he had felt so deeply—should have told upon a temperament at once so sensitive and so conscientious! Suddenly he spoke.

"What do you think of Mattie?" he began, abruptly. "Have I taken enough care of her to satisfy you?" he added, with a very forced laugh, as if to detract from any appearance of particular meaning in his first words.

The rare low laugh with which she answered, was a sound of pure content.

"Indeed, I was delighted to see how well she looked," she said. "I had been half afraid when we got your letter."

"Oh! I didn't want to frighten you into coming," he said, as before. "Yes; I think she is well. And—and happy?"

"Surely," said Sarah, without a shadow of doubt.

Happy! how should she be anything else?

He had come up to the table, and stood fidgeting with a reel of cotton. His whole soul seemed to quiver and ache with the craving he had to ask a question; he could no more force it through his dry throat, between his nervously twitching lips, than the curse-laden mariner could force a prayer. For a moment he fought for the utterance from which at once shame and an unspeakable dread held him thus almost physically back. Then he gave it up; a sudden panic terror of what the answer might be, of what that truth was like behind her veil, swept over him as with a shriek of warning deprecation. In haste, to cover a silence which seemed, now, as if it must be suspicious, he put some trifling question about Beulah; then another, and another, as fast as she could answer them. She was touched, and pleased that, in all his work, his new interests, he had not forgotten.

"You think about us, sometimes, still, then," she said, with one of her old really cheerful smiles.

"Yes," he said, vaguely. He began to walk about the room, his head bent, his face working. "Ay! those were my happy days," he said; and his speech was like a sigh.

She could understand so well!

"'He that now goeth forth, and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, and bring his sheaves with him,'" she said, gently. "One cannot have the blessedness without the burden, can one? not here. But you would not give up any of that blessedness to be rid of the sorrow, would you?"

He looked, he felt, like one to whom, after long oblivious years of exile, should be addressed the language of his infancy; so strange, yet so fraught with memories was such speech now to his soul. He answered,

but with the ambiguity of a sigh; what could he else? at that moment he feared almost his tongue might trip over the once familiar strain. Only, to make a change in a situation which threatened to become intolerable, he now proposed that they should follow Mattie's suggestion and go out to see the place. Sarah assented gladly.

"Do you remember the last time I went a walk with you? the afternoon you went to Tygerfontein?" she said, as she stood up to put away her work-materials. "You told me about that wonderful night you spent in the hut with that poor native and the Englishman. You didn't know how happy that story made me; but I had been feeling —it was wrong, I know, but I did—as if everybody was very lukewarm, as if the days when the Lord wrought mightily for His people had been over very long ago. And then that just put me in heart again; I

remembered about those seven thousand that He had left Him in Israel; I saw that He was always reviving His work in the midst of the years."

She was folding up her sewing and did not look at him as she spoke, or even she must almost have guessed something from his face. He seemed to physically wince and writhe beneath her words. He thought that till that hour he had never known what shame meant.

"Don't talk about that," he said, almost harshly, in a smothered voice.

She looked up, a little surprised; but his face was well turned away, by now—she could not see it.

"Why should I not speak of a great triumph of His grace?" she said, gently. "I have given thanks for it many, many times since then. But I won't talk about it to you, if you had rather not. Maybe you

are right; I suppose the temptation to bow down to our own nets comes to all of us too easily, anyhow; one oughtn't, one wouldn't for worlds, of course, make things any harder to others for any pleasure, or even help to oneself. Only, I thought I should like you to know."

She went out, and left him to such reflections as might occur to him. They were not so attractive but that he was positively glad to see her back, ready for her walk; he thought she could scarcely have anything worse to say; besides, he was seized with a furious desire to rehabilitate himself in his own eyes towards her, who dreamed of no need for rehabilitation. He could easily do it, easily. For if the sequel to that particular episode had been a fiasco (a thing, after all, she could not know), had he not plenty to show her that was not so? Certainly, he had plenty. His pride was up

in arms, desperately on the defensive; every shred or shadow of success with which he could flatter himself as the outcome of his ministerial labours assumed proportions which even he would have hesitated to see in them, under ordinary circumstances—far too ready though he was, in these days, to accept the merest emotional surface-work as valid conversion.

Whether or not he quite succeeded in comforting himself by the exhibition, he at least showed her enough, and still more told her enough, to confirm her in her spiritual hero-worship. She scarcely cared to hide from him a sentiment which in her was pure almost to abstraction; she regarded him, indeed, less as a personality than as a thrice-blessed consciously devoted instrument of a Power behind, which she never forgot, though he did.

They got home before Mattie, who came back, eager and hurried, only just in time

to get ready the evening meal. She seemed tired, but she would not let Sarah do this work for her, or even help her. In fact, it was one of the compromises she had made with her conscience, from the first, that her amusement should never interfere with her husband's actual bodily comfort: the house was not less well-kept, nor was any meal ill-served or unpunctual on excuse of outward business; and she clung to her principle with tenacity.

Runciman went out directly after tea: it was one of his working evenings; the meal had scarcely been so pleasant as that of the night before. Jesse was preoccupied, not to say sullen. His wife understood his mood well enough, but she was quite shrewd enough, also, to feel sure that Sarah would not understand it, would supply her own interpretation, so she did not exert herself to cover his social de-

ficiencies. Her confidence was justified, for Sarah supposed him to be absorbed by the thought of his approaching duties, and was contentedly and respectfully silent not to distract him.

Mattie allowed Sarah to help her clear away and wash up. The cinnamon-tinted young person who had succeeded Sixpence had gone home for the night, according to the almost universal custom.

"Yes," Mattie admitted, "I am rather tired. Yet I was sitting still for the last hour, and I came back in a cab; but I seem to have been in a scramble all the afternoon."

And, emotionally, so she had.

They went back into the living-room, and sat down at the table, opposite one another. Sarah took up some sewing. Mattie made a feint of doing the same, but, after collecting her materials, she proceeded no further. She sat, rather wearily,

idle, with one elbow on the table, and her face resting on her hand, silently watching the swift regular motions of Sarah's fingers, and the occasional gleam of her needle in the lamp-light. Sarah suggested that she should take a little rest, but she refused.

"I'm really more lazy than anything else," she said; "it rests me quite enough to see *you* there. It was very good of you to come, Grannie, dear," she added, with a little sigh as of content.

"It is very good to *be* here," said Sarah; and if ever a tone came from the heart, hers did then.

"I knew I'd feel all right if you were here," continued Mattie; "and I haven't seen that dreadful man again since you came. I used to see him every night; he came up to the window, and flattened his horrid face against the glass, and grinned."

She laughed a little, but shuddered,

too, glancing at the window, still half-askance.

"Dearie, there is nobody there," said Sarah, soothingly.

"I know," said Mattie, a little impatiently. "Of course, I know he was never there at all, really; I know it was only fancy, but that did not make it any better."

She shuddered again; the look of intolerable loathing which was the worst part of this special form of terror in her passed for a moment across her face. "You don't know how horribly, horribly frightened I was that first minute. I think you can never have been so frightened of anything in all your life. I almost wonder I didn't die;" and she spoke with conviction. "Of course, there was no time afterwards quite so bad as that; but it has been bad enough. And, oh!" she went on, with a sudden

change of tone, which was like a swift passionate caress, "I'm *glad* you're come."

"My poor dear, my Mattie! I never guessed it had been as bad as that."

"I know it's awfully silly," said Mattie; "and yet—I was trying—that's just how it came to happen at all. Well, I'll never try that way again, that's certain," she concluded, with decision.

Sarah did not understand; perhaps she scarcely heard; her heart was so full of motherly distress at the thought of what Mattie had suffered.

"But you haven't been like this all the time since you saw him, dearie?" she asked, deprecating her own distress. "Surely you weren't all those evenings alone; Mr. Runciman isn't out every night?"

Mattie gave a sudden quick glance at the speaker; it was exceedingly, almost

imperceptibly swift, but it was a very strange one.

"*That* didn't prevent anything," she said. It seemed as if she would have spoken further; yet what she did add was in no sense a continuation, either as to manner or matter. "Never mind!" she exclaimed, as if resolutely throwing off a burden, "it will be all right now. You've cured me, Grannie," she added, with one of the old coaxing smiles of her school-days. "I don't suppose that'll come back again, ever, now you've once got rid of it for me. Now I'm not going to be lazy any more."

She sprang into a sudden briskness, which made her more like the Mattie of old days than she had been all that evening. Yet the first piece of delicate stitchery which she took out of her basket did not seem to be to her liking just now. She handled it

a little, threaded her needle as slowly as in her idlest fits at Marston, put in a stitch or two in the same fashion. Then all at once she threw it down again.

"I must get on with the bazaar work," she said. "There's more hurry about that."

She crumpled the tiny garment into a sort of ball, and threw it at Sarah's head, as she bent unsuspectingly over her sewing; when Sarah looked up startled, she laughed out, as merrily, as saucily, as ever she had laughed over her innocent practical jokes in the days that were gone.

"Put away that stupid old mending, and do some of this for me, there's a dear," she said, coaxingly. "I shall like to see *you* doing it."

"Will you let me?" said Sarah, as if incredulous of a favour too great.

She took it up, smoothed it out; one would almost have said she fondled it, but

that there was something of reverence in the way she handled it: all her still, pale face, seemed to grow moved and brighter. Mattie looked at her with a sort of almost superior amusement; her own hands, which had moved so languidly a moment since, were brisk and busy enough now, among bright ribbons and laces, and dainty materials of all kinds.

"It had better have been you, Grannie," she said, at last, with a laugh, through which one might barely guess a sigh.

Sarah guessed none. For a moment the shadow of a shade quenched the soft light of her face, but it was on her own account. The shade passed, if the brightness did not quite return.

"'He hath done all things well,'" she said, humbly. "It might have been a snare. I should have made an idol——" She paused; then in a tone which was almost

passionate, she said: "Oh Mattie, aren't you happy?"

"Of course I am; people always are, aren't they?" said Mattie, a little quickly, a little even as it were on the defensive. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"I didn't mean that!" said Sarah, shocked at having seemed to make such an insinuation. "I meant *how* happy you must be! You couldn't be anything else, of course."

"Of course not," repeated Mattie, still with that touch of defiance.

After that they sat in silence for a while; presently Sarah became aware that Mattie's eyes were fixed upon her with a curious intensity of scrutiny. She had dropped her sewing, as if unconsciously; her arms were folded on the table: it seemed almost as if she were trying to get her friend's face by heart.

"What is it, dearie?"

"Nothing; I was thinking."

Sarah smiled a little; it was a novel sort of explanation from Mattie.

"I was wondering who you were like." She paused, then laughed a little. "How queer it is to know so little about one's belongings, as we do—you and me. We just know who our fathers and mothers were, and that's all; we don't even know what they were like to look at. I suppose we must have uncles, and aunts, and cousins somewhere—most people have; perhaps we take after some of them."

"Maybe," said Sarah, laughing too. "What has put that into your head?"

"Oh! I don't know. But it is queer, isn't it? We must be like somebody, I suppose. I wonder who I favour?" she went on, persistently. "Perhaps I take after my grandmother; I must have had one once, mustn't I?"

She was looking, as it were, furtively at Sarah, now, bringing out the sentences in little jerks with aimless, rather forced giggles between; she seemed to be watching the effect of them on her friend.

"Do people ever take after their grandmothers?" she went on; "perhaps after their *great*-grand—folks? No; I should think that would be too far back, shouldn't you? Fathers and mothers, or uncles and aunts, but not grandmothers, let alone great-grandmothers. Shouldn't you think so?"

She seemed really to want an answer to her sudden string of speculations.

"I don't know, dearie, at all. I never thought about it. As you say, it don't seem likely. Still, I've known children that everybody said weren't like any of their belongings; maybe they had taken back to their grandfathers or grandmothers — or further still. One can't tell."

"No," said Mattie, and now she smothered a sigh. "One can't tell. One can never be sure—of *what* may happen—in that way."

She fixed her eyes on Sarah again; and now there was in them something of the inexplicable look that her face had worn once before that night. She looked till it had passed, then—

"I wish baby may be like you," she exclaimed, abruptly, and seemingly in all seriousness.

"Like me!" exclaimed Sarah, and this time she laughed with pure amusement. "What a thing to wish, even if it could be! What odd things you are saying to-night, dearie."

"I don't see anything odd in that," returned Mattie, with a touch of offence. "I'm sure it couldn't take after anyone better," she added, with one of her most

bewitching transitions of mood. "And if you come to odd—I often think much"—she hesitated, as if for an epithet—"much *odder* things than that." But the little sort of shiver which caught her breath as she ceased pointed to a more tragic definition of her thoughts. As if in fear that Sarah might guess as much, she went on hastily, with a sudden change of tone and subject which was like enough to the volatile Mattie of old: "Isn't that the old shell-pincushion I brought you back from Skelthorpe the autumn I had been at the Convalescent Home, after I had had the fever so badly? To think of your having that still!"

"Dearie," said Sarah, tenderly, with that wistful, motherly tenderness of hers, "I think there is nothing you ever gave me in your life that I have not got by me somewhere."

Mattie jumped up from her seat and ran

across to her friend, as if she were indeed that little girl again. She put her arms round Sarah's neck, and kissed her, in the way for which the elder girl's heart had hungered so long. Then she sat down on the floor beside her and laid her head against Sarah's knee. She turned the poor little gift, with its faded velvet and gap-toothed shell-work, idly over in her fingers.

"What a hideous thing it is!" she laughed, "and I remember I thought it so beautiful, then! How long ago that was! I was ten years old, then—just half of all my life ago. I was very ill that time, wasn't I?"

"Very; we thought we should have lost our Mattie."

"You would have been very sorry, wouldn't you? I wonder," she went on, with a half-disguised seriousness, "I wonder if you could ever come to think it would

have been a good thing? if anything could ever make you think it would have been better if I had died then?"

"My Mattie! what a thing to think of! Of course not."

"Not even if I was very, very unhappy? more unhappy than you could bear to think of?"

Sarah thought a moment.

"No," she said then, firmly, "not even then. Because if you missed some of the suffering you might miss some of the glory, too. But I hope you will never be so unhappy as all that, dearie; I hope you will have as little to bear always as anybody can," she ended, with pathetic illogicalness.

Mattie reached up after her friend's hand, and fondled it against her own cheek.

"There isn't anything could make you wish such a thing, then?" she went on, with

what seemed to Sarah a whimsical persistence. "Not anything at all?"

"Nothing—except, perhaps, sin. But why should we think of such a dreadful thing as that?" she said, soothingly. Mattie must certainly be much more tired than she would admit, she thought, to persist in such a curious mood.

Mattie remained silent for a moment after that. Then she suddenly half-raised herself from the floor, and clasping her hands on Sarah's knee, looked up into her face; her own was strangely wistful.

"If I ever did do anything very wicked; if I got very, very bad, indeed, so as nobody would have anything to say to me any more—would you give me up, too?"

"I could never give you up, dearie," she said, simply; yet no protestations could have done other than weaken the effect of her tone.

"I'm glad," said Mattie, as simply. "Because," she went on, with a sudden strange passion, "because if I thought *you* would ever give me up, whatever happened, I shouldn't care to try to be good any more at all."

That was not very logical, either; but Sarah understood — the feeling, at least; but of any cause for it, other than a not inexplicable nervous depression, she had no faintest suspicion. Perhaps, however, Mattie thought she had gone too far, for she laughed all at once. "But I'm *not* very wicked, you know, Grannie," she said, "and I'm not unhappy—not at all. It only came into my head."

"Your poor little head is tired," said Sarah, pityingly. "That's all there is wrong, I know."

Mattie laid it back, with a sort of

cuddling, reposeful movement, in its former position.

"Sing me to sleep then, Grannie," she said lazily, with a little laugh.

Sarah laughed too; she began some childish rhyme.

"No," said Mattie, with a spoilt-child petulance which was not exactly what she felt, "not that. You remember that old hymn you used to sing to the little ones at Marston? something about a cradle—a nice sleepy old hymn. Sing me that."

Sarah obeyed without remark, though it was the first time in her life she had ever heard Mattie ask for a hymn. She sang it through once, in her low, soft contralto—a voice neither rich nor clear, but very tender. She sang it half through again; and then she went on for a few moments longer in a gentle wordless croon, for the little black curly head rested more heavily against her

knee, the thick, black lashes lay drooping upon the soft, rounded cheek ; the breath came and went as gently and regularly as an infant's. Mattie was fast asleep.

## CHAPTER XXII.

Perhaps, after all, Sarah had been right, and mere bodily fatigue accounted for Mattie's mood that night. Certainly there was no trace left of it next day; nor, in fact, did she ever again allude to those strange spectres of sin and sorrow, of something mysterious which was neither sin nor sorrow, yet as terrible as both. She did not even seem to be haunted by such thoughts in secret. To all appearance her spirits were excellent, nor could the most acute observer have seen any reason to suspect that they were feigned. Indeed, they were not. In the protection of Sarah's presence her

troubles, real and shadowy, had vanished, not into nothingness, but into oblivion.

Altogether, for two out of the three days at least, that was a happy visit. It was all too brief. On the afternoon of its tenth day, on her return from a walk, Sarah found a telegram awaiting her. She tore it open with a foreboding; she read it with a little cry of distress.

"Father dangerously ill, we fear dying. Come at once."

It was a great shock; for in the one letter she had received from her husband, two days before, the only hint given of any illness of the minister had been nothing more alarming than that "the governor seems to have got a little chill; he potters about over his gardening too much for an old chap in this sort of weather." But it is probable that her distress, and she was distressed, was largely on account of Sam. To

him, indeed, her heart went out in his trouble, as it did to all suffering creatures, with a longing to comfort which actually made the hours that must elapse before she could leave Beaconsfield go slowly for her. Yet at the last moment, when her tearful eyes strained for the second time after the last sight of Mattie, her holiday seemed to her to have been short indeed.

There was one to whom it had seemed all too long. To Jesse it was a relief that she was gone, she and her innocent cruelties. He was glad, and did not suspect that, in refusing once again to apply the discipline, he was simply preparing for himself a chastisement of scorpions.

The day of the bazaar came. Towards the middle of the morning Mattie summoned her husband to the parlour to see her in her festal adornments before she set off. If there had been some little loss of the old sparkle

and colour in her of late, for to-day at least she had regained it all. In her gown, of some soft yet bright rose-colour, her charming little head just crested, as it were, above the curly blackness with the filmy white of her tiny coquettish cap; with her eyes, her feet, her whole person dancing, sparkling, fluttering with excitement, she looked like some brilliant foreign bird just alighted there in the sunshine.

For a moment he forgot. In the intoxication of her brightness, her revivified beauty, he forgot that it was not for him. He made a step forward to take her in his arms; to hold that loveliness; to put it from him, then, that seeing might enhance the rapture of clasping it again. Mattie saw the blaze in his eyes, which she had learned to know too well. She drew back, waving him off daintily.

"You mustn't touch me," she exclaimed.

"I want to get there nice and fresh—as fresh as one can for this horrid dust."

She was looking down at herself, coquettishly, complacently; not at him, who stepped aside with something in his face that might have startled her. She proceeded to take off her cap and apron; then she put on her hat and covered her butterfly splendours with the sober little ulster which had been part of her Marston outfit. Then she looked round the room.

"Mind you see that 'Stina makes you comfortable," she said. "I've told her everything, but her head is like a sieve. I'm ashamed to go and leave the room in this state" (and, indeed, it was untidy enough, littered all over with the accumulation of two days' packing and unpacking of parcels and so forth); "but I really haven't had a minute to put things straight. You won't mind for to-day? You had

better not expect me back any before ten; Mrs. Wheeler is going from here, she'll bring me home. Oh! there is the cab. Good-bye!" She threw him a kiss, airily, with her finger-tips. "I do hope you'll be comfortable," she added, with genuine earnestness.

By this time he had mastered himself outwardly with a really terrible effort.

"Oh! I shall do very well," he said, almost boisterously. "I—I hope you'll enjoy yourself."

She nodded; the next moment she was gone. He went back into the room and stared at the empty strip of sunshine where she had stood, brilliant, unapproachable, repulsing him. He thought, now, that he hated her. How dared she, how dared she play with him like this? Yet he was only fighting with shadows. He had not one fact to go upon with which he could actually

confront and reproach her; he had never heard a word, never caught a look which he could accuse as having wronged him. He had never even seen them together.

Suddenly a passionate desire seized him to do that, at least; to make use of this opportunity to satisfy himself. It would be so easy to do that; let her even be on her guard, there was little fear that she would succeed in blinding him. And she would not be on her guard; neither of them would be: before they knew that he was near at all, he would have been able to judge—to recognize his position as heaven or as hell.

Still he held out for a while; the body does sometimes resist for a time after the foundations have been sapped in the soul. The long blank hours dragged on. On many mornings there would have been distractions—people coming for assistance,

temporal or spiritual, or on business. To-day there were none; not a creature came near the place. He sat and dawdled over his writing till dinner-time, then went in to his solitary meal.

It was a mere farce; he left it, practically, untouched. He was just in the condition in which many a man flies to stimulants; but, mercifully for Jesse, he had taken the pledge years since, on his conversion, and abstinence had become by this time so much a second nature, that this remedy did not even occur to his imagination.

The ten minutes or so occupied by this so-called meal, just sufficed to unsettle him, and that was all. He hung about in and out of the rooms and did not well know what to do with himself; and the more he indulged his restlessness the more it grew. He began to repent his resolution of staying

indoors. After all it was foolish; he would be less haunted if he were to go out. He took his hat and went out, accordingly; and once he had allowed himself that, there was an end of it. He made almost as many excuses as he took steps; but nobody but himself could have been surprised to find him, half-an-hour later, wandering about the streets of Kimberley in the immediate neighbourhood of the Town Hall, drifting a little nearer with every turn he took; his reasonableness a little less, his anxiety a little greater, with the passage of every moment.

Perhaps he really deserved to meet Westoby; at any rate, this was not spared him. He was standing staring with his bodily eyes into a shop-window in New Main Street, with the vision of his mind very much elsewhere, feeling that he had given in, and preparing himself to give in

even more completely, from a sort of angry despair at his acknowledged failure, when his enemy caught sight of him. Westoby was on the other side of the street, and he doubted for a moment whether it would be worth while to cross over. He knew perfectly well where Runciman would be going, and he really did not care to make superfluous mischief when circumstances and his victim's temperament amply sufficed for the work. But, on the whole, he decided that to give a little stir to the devil's brew he had set boiling could do no harm, and might quicken a process which there was no use in needlessly prolonging.

He came across just as Jesse was turning away from his sightless contemplation. The young man would have passed on with no more than his usual unwilling tribute in the way of recognition,

but he was not allowed. The remark on the weather which stopped him was innocent enough, but it did stop him, which was all it was meant to do.

"Good weather for the bazaar folks, too," Westoby went on, nodding towards where a string of flags across the street marked the spot. "They'll be doing well."

"Yes," said Jesse, vaguely. He paused, then added, desperately, "Have you been in?"

"Oh, I gave a look round, just now, as I happened to be passing." Of course, he had never been near the place, and would not have dreamed of making so improbable an assertion on his own initiative; but if Runciman showed himself thus prepared to believe it, why, so much the better. "Were you thinking of looking in?"

"I — I thought, perhaps — that is, I

hadn't quite made up my mind. I don't much care for bazaars. But one ought to —to show a little interest in — in ——" faltered Jesse.

Westoby gave him a look; it was the look which, at one time or another, had made, probably, all his thralls in turn feel how uselessly they had lied to him—which is, in itself, a demoralizing sensation.

"Ah, to be sure," he said; "it's for the football club, ain't it? Yes, you would be interested; folks would expect it of you. You go in a good deal for that sort of thing, don't you?"

Jesse bit his lips, wild with rage and shame — yet dumb, too, as he seemed doomed to stand before this man.

"For all that," continued Westoby, without seeming to notice his discomfiture, "if you ain't quite made up your mind to go, I reckon, if I was you, I'd make it up

to keep away. I've been in, you see, and that would be my advice."

Jesse's voice choked on his question, but Westoby found it convenient to supply an interpretation.

"Slow, did you say? Oh, no!" he said, with a sufficiently expressive grin, "not that, I shouldn't say—not for the stall-holders and that lot, any way. Oh, not at all; no."

His eyes seemed to twinkle at some hilarious recollection.

"What do you mean?" cried Jesse, his fury bursting at last into words.

"Oh, nothing much — only that two's company, and—well, likely you know what three is. Ay, I reckon I'd keep away."

The devil of his late possession, exorcised for so brief a space, came back with sevenfold rage. The first oath that had passed his lips since the days of his turbulent boyhood broke from them now; he

turned and went down the street at a pace which instinct alone kept from being quite a run.

Westoby leisurely pursued his own path.

"Not so bad—for a minister of religion," he said to himself. "But you wait a bit, my boy; I've a deal more for you to learn, yet—more of all sorts. You bet."

Meanwhile, Runciman had reached the Town Hall. When he entered, the bazaar was not at its briskest. The room could not be called empty, but there was a comparative lull in the proceedings: all but a few of the most conscientious saleswomen showed a certain languor in their office; some had gone off duty altogether, and were strolling about with a few rare cavaliers, or comparing notes with fellow-stall-holders across the way. Still, there was sound and movement: a band was just concluding some operatic selection;

the place was full of a sort of subdued murmur of steps and voices, incessant, indistinguishable. Not the roar of the full flood of traffic, nor the kaleidoscopic, evanescent effect of such a moving crowd as would be there in the evening; yet enough to stifle with its indifferent chorus, to cover with its unsuspecting smile, a fair number of little tragedies and comedies, of which Runciman's was, after all, only one.

Another, springing from the same root as his own, yet of whose very existence he was unconscious, much more of its common origin, confronted him almost as he entered the room. Sophy de Jongh stood leaning against the counter in front of her stall, in a rather monumental attitude of depression. Her meek eyes were dull with it; her whole bearing, never vivacious, too patently acknowledged in every line the sorrows of her simple soul. Yet she stood at her post like

an unromantic Casabianca ; in all the room there was not a girl so conscientious as Sophy. If her heart had been fairly breaking, she would still have done her somewhat heavy best to tempt or suit a purchaser; if by quitting her stall she could have secured the happiness of a lifetime, it is doubtful whether she could quite have reconciled her conscience to the step.

Jesse Runciman came straight up the room like one in a dream ; of all its sights there were none for him, since, look around him as he might, the one which filled his soul was not to be seen. Moving mechanically, avoiding obstacles with the unconscious caution of a somnambulist, he stopped at last in front of Sophy's stall : stopped simply because there was no apparent means of going further.

"Can I sell you anything, Mr. Runciman ?"

He looked up from the counter, over which his restless eyes were wandering, and turned their hungry, half-conscious gaze upon the speaker. At that moment he had not the dimmest recollection of ever having seen her before ; not that it surprised him to hear her mention his name—nothing surprised, or moved, or distracted him now. What was it all but the phantasmagoria of a dream ? In all the world were only three realities—himself, and *her*, and another.

Something was put into his hand ; with a vague idea that he had been asked to pay for it, he began to feel automatically in his pocket. Then, he did not even withdraw his hand ; he stood forgetting everything in the momentary belief that he had caught sight of Mattie. It was not she ; but his eyes, his whole person seemed suddenly to start into consciousness at the thought.

"Were you looking for Mrs. Runciman?" asked Sophy. The touch of spite in her voice was very small, and very little venomous; she must have been almost more than human for it to have been absent altogether.

"I saw her go into the tea-room, a little while ago, with Mr. Blake. I don't think they have come back."

The light that leapt into his eyes then, made that of a moment before seem pale and unmeaning. With a look she did not care to see, he flung half a handful of money upon the counter, recklessly, as it were desperately, and was gone.

One of Sophy's defaulting assistants strolled up, giggling; she looked at the little newly-scattered heap of coin.

"Goodness! Sophy, you are a good seller. How do you manage?—and in the slack hours, too! Actually gold—half-a-

sovereign. If only we could all do like that!"

Sophy, glancing askance at it, looked more scared than pleased.

"Put it away for me, dear," she said, plaintively; she never came nearer than this to being cross.

Somehow she did not like to handle it herself; this gold touched a very unsophisticated conscience, which was less obtuse than her perceptions, with a sense of crime. Sophy was a dull woman, but she had her emotions; and they were little less primitive than the man's passions. Still they were but emotions; they enabled her, indeed, to interpret him, but with fright and remorse, not with sympathy.

"Listen!" said Gerald Blake.

On a settee, in one corner of the smaller room set apart for refreshments, behind an

artistic arrangement of ornamental shrubs and Japanese screens, sat Mattie Runciman; Gerald was lounging beside her. His attitude, though graceful, was quite sufficiently free and easy; hers, as she sat turned somewhat aside, one little hand tossing over the bunches of fast-fading flowers in the smart beribboned basket on her lap, betrayed a certain amount of embarrassment, which yet was not all unpleasant. In fact, Gerald was getting very reminiscent and sentimental; there were circumstances which made him feel rather reckless just now—he did not greatly care what he said or did, or what might come of anything. The circumstances, indeed, were such as—morality apart—ought to have rendered him very particularly prudent and circumspect; but that was not Gerald's way. "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

The air was hot and langorous; the half-

sweet, half death-sickening odour of flowers touched by the first breath of decay, came stealing up from Mattie's basket; the sound of the band from the further room came softened to them as they sat—some sort of slow regretful valse.

From reminiscences he fell to pleading—pleading with that too low insinuating voice, even more with those beautiful pathetic eyes. Half-laughing, half-pettishly, she pushed the basket towards him. He waved it back, pointed to a rosebud she wore among the lace at her throat; his hand crept towards it. With a sudden blush she pulled it out and tossed it over to him. He came yet nearer.

"I can't thank you enough," he murmured. "Mayn't I show you how I thank you? May I?"

He took her hand, ever so gently—so humbly; tried to lift it. She twisted about a little in his hold.

"You won't refuse me that?" he said. "So little!"

She resisted for the brief moment in which she could still look him in the face; then as her eyes wavered, turned away, and fell, her hand lay motionless but for a tremulous flutter, like that in the breast of a startled bird. He bent towards it; his lips touched it——

"Come, Mattie, it is time to go home." She could scarcely blush more vividly than she was doing then; but she could not repress a little start and scream. The next instant she had recovered herself; but she did not feel particularly reassured.

"Oh! Jesse, it's you, is it? How you made me jump! What do you want? I can't go home yet, you know, it isn't possible." She spoke hurriedly—a little nervously. "What is it? Hasn't Christina——"

"Go and get ready."

She stood up.

"Oh! dear, what troublesome creatures men are," she said, with an affectation of laughter.

"Well, Mr. Blake, please get Mrs. Johnson to forgive me for running away like this. It isn't a very busy time just now, and tell her I'll be back for the evening."

She ended with a touch of defiance.

"Are you going?" said Runciman. His eyes followed her to the door; as she passed through, he turned for a second. For a mere flash of time the sort of breathless furious stillness which had suppressed both voice and manner till now was shivered into tempest.

"As for you, you scoundrel!" he cried —yet he could not make it a cry, his voice was choked. "As for you, so sure as there is——"

He did not finish; it seemed he was

afraid of letting out the treasures of his wrath lest he should be interfered with before his soul could be satisfied. He turned from Blake as abruptly as he had turned upon him, and followed Mattie towards the cloak-room.

Some instinct told her that it would be better to make haste; she came out almost as he reached the door, having merely waited to put on her hat. A cab was outside; he called it and got in after her. They drove off; he had laid hold of her arm, and sat silent, grasping it. After a minute or two she began to fidget.

"Leave go, Jesse," she said, pettishly. "I'm cold; I want to put on my ulster. What do you want holding me like that? You don't think I'm going to run away?" she ended, with the same uncertain sound of laughter as before.

He answered her only by a look. She

made no more attempt to free herself; muttering something inaudible, she pulled the wrap round her with her free hand as best she could, and then leaned back and pretended to be resting, with closed eyes. They crossed the veld without another word; at the door of their own house he released her perforce. Once inside he flung open the door of the nearest room.

"Go in there!" he said.

"I shan't!" said Mattie, defiant now through sheer fright. "I'm going to the kitchen to see about the fire. I'm cold and tired, and I want some tea."

"Do you hear me?" he said; and now his voice came out like a cry.

"The whole street could do that," she muttered, with some exaggeration, "so I suppose I can." She marched in, however, flung herself into a chair, and began pulling off her gloves with an injured expression.

He followed her, closing the door behind him; she was sensible of a certain relief in finding that he did not lock it. He came and stood over her. "And now," he said, and his voice so trembled with rage that she could scarcely follow him, "and now tell me what you mean by—by the way—— How dare you? how *dare* you let any man—— Oh! I shall go mad!"

With a sudden cry of absolutely inarticulate fury, he positively shook her as she sat—shook her fiercely once and again. Mattie burst into tears of mingled fright and anger.

"I wasn't doing any harm," she sobbed. "You are very wicked and horrid to treat me like this."

"Harm!" he cried, stepping back suddenly, with a movement that was more like flinging her off than releasing her. "Do you suppose that if I thought you had

been doing what you call harm, you would be alive now to talk about it?"

He paused, as it were breathless; Mattie sobbed on. She did not exactly believe him; she was too well accustomed to the violent exaggerations of his language whenever he was moved in any way. But she had never seen him in this state before, and felt strangely helpless to manage it; moreover, she had gone through a great deal that day in many ways, and what with that and the fright and violence of the present scene, she began to feel thoroughly ill and upset. But if she had had any answer ready she could scarcely have delivered it; it was but an instant before he broke out with redoubled fury.

"Ah, harm! And how long was it to have been before that, anyhow? What was there that he asked just now that you

thought to refuse him? Your flowers, your hair, your hand—— Oh!"

And once more he had no language but a cry. But now a sudden shock at once of indignation and a more serious alarm than she had yet felt, checked Mattie's tears for a moment, and gave her words.

"You were listening!" she exclaimed, indignantly.

"Yes," he said, too much concentrated in wrath even for defiance.

"Then you ought to be ashamed to stand there and tell me so! You ought to——"

"Shame!" he retorted, furiously. "It is fine for you to talk to me of shame! Where is your own? Why aren't you down on your knees to ask my pardon, if any way I might forgive you? How do you only dare to hold up your head before me any more? Do you understand that I saw—

how that man sat by, looked at you, touched you—that I heard——"

And then, without a word, a look of warning, except the sudden leap of a more animal devil into the blazing anger of his eyes, he seemed to spring upon her; gathered her up to him in an embrace which was a mere gratifying of hate, not love; kissed her with hot, hungry, devouring kisses, among her hair, upon her eyes, her lips, her hands, her neck, till she was blinded, and burning, and dizzy, with his violence.

"There, and there, and there!" he panted. "And for all you ever gave him you shall give me double, and treble, and an hundredfold, and refuse me if you dare, and I wish mine were fire that they might burn out the stain of his—yes, even if it were to the bone—and make you over again for me!"

She sobbed and shrank, and hid her face, as under an insult which she had neither the power to avert nor the spirit—perhaps, even the right—to resent.

He changed again; releasing her as suddenly as he had seized her, he stepped back a pace; he stood as it were stooping together, and voice, eyes, bearing were really those of the elementary savage.

"Do you know," he cried, "that you belong to *me?*"

He put both his hands on her shoulders, pressing down upon her as though he would impose his words upon her by main force. He brought his face down upon a level with hers, very close and near; she glanced, then turned away her head and eyes with an ever-growing terror, for, indeed, it was not good to see.

"You are mine," he repeated through his set teeth. "Everything you have is

mine. Every hair of your head belongs to me, and every touch of your hand. You have no right to look, or smile, or speak except for me. You have no more right over yourself any more at all; you are all mine, for anything I choose."

She wept like a creature in the last despair.

"Give me your hand!" he cried, and she gave it. It lay in his trembling—with how different a tremor from that with which it had yielded itself to another clasp! He pointed down at the wedding-ring which shone on it alone. "Do you see that?" he said. "Do you know what it means? Let me ever know you dare to forget it again!"

With a sort of wild animal fury he crushed up the little hand within his, pressing, grinding the fingers together with a force more than all his own with rage,

till Mattie screamed aloud with pain and terror.

"Let me go!" she cried, struggling and sobbing in a sort of frenzy of despair and fear. "Let me go! You horrid, horrid—— Oh! I hate you; I hate you! I'll not stay with you any more; I won't. You are nothing in the world but a savage—not one bit different from your dear natives outside! You don't know how to treat a woman properly. They had no right to give a white girl to a man like you!"

She pushed him from her with hysterical strength, and he stood staring at her: a sort of shiver ran through him. For one briefest instant it seemed as though the inferior nature which just then was certainly predominant might stand cowed. The next, as if the words had rather been the last blow to such feeble barriers of tradition as still stemmed the flood of savagery, he threw up

his arms with a look, a cry, which froze her helpless passion into speechless, motionless terror.

"So much the worse for you!" he shouted. "So much the worse for you!"

He came a step nearer; she would have fled now, but her limbs refused their office. She stood grasping the edge of the table, unable to avert her eyes, to cry out, to think —to do anything but fear.

"You won't stay with me, won't you? We'll see about that!"

A kitchen knife lay among the litter on the table; he snatched it up from within an inch of her fingers, but she never moved the stony terror of her eyes from the face which he kept turned on hers.

"Now I shall kill you," he said, breathlessly; "I shall kill you with my own hands. If you won't stay with me living, you shall stay with me dead!"

If she had screamed, protested, struggled, he probably would have done it. She did nothing of all this. Before the blow could fall she had broken together, as it were, just where she stood. She lay at his feet as helpless, as unresisting as in death he would have had her. He stood a moment in the position in which the suspended blow had left him. Then with a gesture of horror great unto dumbness, he flung away the knife and rushed out of the room and out of the house.

The sunshine of the day that had begun so gaily for her had touched the poor dishevelled waves of Mattie's hair when she first fell. The ray crawled further, slowly, a narrow gliding golden bar, along the tumbled, disordered folds of the once dainty rose-coloured gown, slipped down to her feet, then slid off her altogether; and it was

not till then that Mattie stirred a little. Presently, she half raised herself from the floor, only to sink together again as helpless as before. She wondered, confusedly, if she should die there, all alone, and a few weak tears came into her eyes at the thought.

Ten minutes later, Christiana, coming back from a surreptitious outing, saw her so through the open parlour door. With much dismay, and much questioning and ejaculation, she helped her into her own room and into bed, Mattie saying no word either of direction or explanation, only sobbing faintly from time to time, with little shivering sobs. But when the girl, having done all she could and very much frightened, proposed to go for more experienced help, urging that missis might die, Mattie spoke at last.

"Yes, you may go—I don't want to die," she wailed; "I'm not fit to die. But if," she went on, bursting suddenly into a

passion of hysterical sobs which the terrified assistant could do nothing to check—"but if anything should happen—if anything has happened—I shan't be sorry; I shall be glad!"

## CHAPTER XXIII.

It was scarcely his good genius which seemed just now to stand always between Jesse Runciman and all cognizance of his failures and misdeeds, in any quarter whence help might have come to him. This time, at least, it might have seemed that enough scandal would have been got up to have come to the ears of his superiors in Cape Town. But it was not so, and this, though the culprit himself, at first made no effort to conceal his conduct.

When, at the end of three or four hours he came back, in his right mind and ashamed beyond all power of expression

—almost too utterly absorbed in shame, even to remember that he had considerable cause for alarm, only anxious to be allowed to humble himself in the dust—he had been met almost on the threshold by the doctor, with the information that Mattie was most seriously ill, that her life depended on absolute quiet, and that he could not be allowed to see her on any conditions whatever. The doctor had given his sentence as considerately as possible, thinking that he was breaking news for which his hearer could have had no preparation; but the agony of entreaty, remonstrance and remorse into which Jesse fell at once, as he almost fought to get past by main force, was enough to convey an explanation which Mattie had been in no condition to give, even if she had wished to do so. He cut it short with a peremptory sternness which Jesse was forced to mind, and returned to

the patient; but when he came back again at last, prepared to leave the house, he found the young man in such a state, though outwardly quiet, that he forthwith added to his prescriptions one for a long sleeping-draught which Jesse, humbled into obedience, took in due course, and which probably saved his reason.

But no one else ever knew the details of the secret history of that afternoon; very few even suspected it in outline. Westoby, indeed, when he had heard, through Dreyer, of Mrs. Runciman's illness, was able to reconstruct the scene almost as well as though he had been present, and began, without haste, to make preparations for the next move. Sophy de Jongh, hearing, also had suspicions strong enough to cost her two or three days of secret but severe anguish—days during which a not unnatural resentment could not quell a

terror in which the pangs of conscience, accusing her of having spoken under the influence of a vindictiveness which seemed now absolutely diabolical, were not a little reinforced by an unacknowledged dread of a reckoning with Mattie's reproachful ghost, in the event of her death. Nobody, not even Dora Solomon, knew quite how primitive Sophy really was.

But among the few members of their acquaintance at Beaconsfield, Mattie was generally credited with having brought her calamities upon herself by her reckless worldliness and pursuit of pleasure at all costs.

"Just what might have been expected, and serve her right! Gallivanting about from morning to night; in and out of Kimberley two or three times a day; always able for that sort of thing, though she was too done up to come and help at Mrs. Burgess' tea-meeting, and too busy to be

a little civil to people that might look for something better than such airs in a chit like that. Who's she, pray, that Beaconsfield's not good enough for her? Pity her! it's him that ought to be pitied—a great affliction for a godly young man to have a wife like that."

But when Mattie came to an understanding of the verdict, she accepted it without protest or appeal, feeling, probably, that though a discovery of the truth might damage Jesse's reputation, it could scarcely improve her own.

Yet though it seemed that he was not to be punished, otherwise than by a merely negative loss, which—except for the shame to himself involved in the circumstances—it is to be feared he did not greatly feel, though he was not even reprimanded, except by his own conscience, still Jesse was really scarcely less miserable than he deserved

to be. It was severe penance, and of a kind to which he was little accustomed, to be obliged to keep his penitence to himself: not to be allowed even to ask forgiveness; but it did him good. The discipline, at least, was so far effectual, that when, after nearly a week, he was permitted, under strict cautions, to see his wife again, the interview, though painful, was quiet enough.

Mattie, wrapped in a thick shawl, was sitting up in a big Madeira chair full of cushions. She looked very small and pale, and was herself more subdued than was to be accounted for by physical weakness, for, indeed, she was gaining strength rapidly. But she understood that, for a few hours at least, she had been within an appreciable distance of death, and her own conscience had not prophesied such smooth things to her, but that she was still decidedly serious and full of good resolutions in view of her

escape. Somehow, she scarcely realized his actual attack upon her as having been an element in her peril; she supposed, now, that he had only wanted to frighten her. Some people did such things, of course, and their doings got into newspapers; but it seemed impossible to grotesqueness that it might really have happened to her.

Jesse stood a little way off, looking at her till the tears interposed between him and all sight of her; then he came and knelt down by her chair, and hid his face upon the arm.

"Will you be able to forgive me, some day?—ever?" he said.

"I'm not angry," she said, with a little sigh. "But, oh! Jesse," she added, piteously, "I thought I was going to die."

"And then I should have been a murderer. You may say it — say what you please of me; nothing can be worse than

I think of myself, nothing worse than I deserve."

"There is no use in talking that way, for either of us," she said, wearily. She hesitated a moment; then, turning away her head a little: "I—I wasn't good, myself. But it is ever so true," she added, with more energy, "and if you had asked me when I thought I was dying, I should have said the same—I never meant any real harm; I never did."

He had thought that the dead themselves could not be more incapable of passion than he would be, on that subject, for evermore; yet this first reference was enough to send a pang through him. It was not anger, any more—he had really exhausted every possibility of wrath—but something at once cowing and troublous: a fear and a tormenting. He put up his hand with a gesture of deprecation.

"If you have forgiven me—" he began; and there he paused. The terms of endearment which rose so naturally to his lips, tender expletives taking off the edge of every remonstrance, the language of caress, more expressive than speech: these he did not dare to use. She said she had forgiven; but there had been nothing in her manner which could embolden him to be on those terms again so soon.

"If you have forgiven me," he resumed, with that bald sobriety which meant much bitterness to him, "never talk about all that any more, will you?"

"I'm sure I don't want to," said Mattie, with truth. "We never need."

Then there was silence; he knelt on a little longer, and she sat; she showed no impatience, neither any compassion; she had no kiss, no touch of absolution for him; and he dared not ask it. Yet she

had said truly that she was not angry; she had met his confession half-way with her own. They had both done their duty—it had been no pleasanter than they deserved, but it had been done. Now, why would he not go? It would be so much better; yet it would have been against her still fresh resolutions to suggest this. Presently he did rise of his own accord.

"I had better not stay any longer," he said, wistfully; "I shall be tiring you."

Of course, he had hoped she would have contradicted him; but she did not, though his suggestion did not represent the actual fact. So far as physical fatigue went, she could have borne much more.

He got just as far as the door; there he stood and fidgeted with the handle a little, and then, as if almost in defiance of his will, he suddenly came half-way back again.

"And—and, Mattie, you didn't really mean what you said—that afternoon?"

A faint colour came into her cheeks. She had so hoped that he would be able to refrain from saying this. It is true she had rather hoped than expected it.

"What of all the things I may have said? There is no use in raking them all up, one by one, is there?" she answered, a little fretfully; and he could not tell whether, or how far, it was an evasion. "I daresay we both said a good deal more than we meant that time; one does, when one is in a temper, doesn't one? The best thing we can do now is to forget it all."

If only, through all the days that were to come, he might hope ever to forget! Words that he had at one time thought would be the last he might ever hear her speak. Oh! Heaven, what last words for a life's memories! He could neither leave the subject nor

openly approach it; how could he? such things are not to be said in cold blood.

"You—you won't go away, will you?" he said, venturing on the more practical portion of his trouble, which yet was so much the smaller. "Don't do that. I don't deserve that you should trust yourself to me any more, but don't do that. I am punished as much as I can bear."

And, indeed, to be allowed to be with her, even on sufferance, seemed, after the days of his deprivation, a thing to be thankful for: her absence a thing too terrible to be endured.

Mattie opened her eyes a little. In good truth she had almost forgotten that particular clause of her fatal speech. It had been a mere hysterical utterance of the despair of the moment; the thought was at once too unpractical—for where, in the wide world, should she go?—and too utterly alien

from all her traditions, to have lingered in her memory. For a wife to leave her husband, under any circumstances! Even the somewhat airy morality with which she had become theoretically familiarized since her arrival in South Africa, had not prepared her to make such a practical application of it in her own case.

She paused on her answer for a moment, in sheer surprise; he took it for hesitation.

"Have patience with me," he pleaded, with an all too abject passion; "you shall never regret it. I'll watch from day to day, and from hour to hour, for any least little sign you will give me of what I can do to make up to you—to make you forget, if you can. You shall only have to speak to have any wish of your heart; you shan't have to speak, because I shall know it before you ask, and if I have to get it at

the price of my heart's blood, you shall have it. And some day," he went on, anxiously, piteously, "some day you will love me a little again—because, oh! it must be that you loved me *once;* that you didn't always feel—I must have known—— And you couldn't hold out always against even a dog that should serve for you as I will."

She looked at him—his craving eyes, his pleading hands—and a fear began to dawn in her face, mingled with a repugnance which her best efforts could not altogether subdue. She had never been comfortable under the manifestations of his passion—now that she had discovered what the ultimate expression of that passion could be, it simply revolted her.

"Oh! Jesse, do try and be quiet," she exclaimed, almost pathetically.

His eyes fell; he bent his head as under a rebuke too just to be resented.

"You needn't be afraid," he said, humbly; "I'm not going to touch you. I know how I must have made you feel about that. I know I don't deserve even to be allowed to kiss your feet. But I'll have such patience; I'll be thankful for so little—only don't take away my last little hope. Only let me have the chance."

"Very well," she said, wearily, willing to make any verbal concession if so she might get rid of him. In the same hope she closed her eyes and let her head sink back among the cushions. "It's all right," she murmured; "I'm not going."

She had prepared herself for an outburst of gratitude as fatiguing as his entreaties, but his "Thank you," came quite quietly, on a sigh, and when she opened her eyes a minute later she was alone.

He was not really much less unhappy

than he had been before. In fact, his penitence was scarcely more satisfactory than his passion, of which, indeed, it was little more than a new development. Against her only had he sinned—even as he had had no feeling about her misdoings save that of the wrong done to himself. And for her, should there be no other way, he was only too well prepared to sin again, after some different fashion. Yet it surprised him that now, after having delivered his soul of its burden of confession and repentance, he did not even feel less alienated from all real desire for good, less disinclined both for his ministerial work and for the private exercises of his religion, than he had been conscious of feeling during all these days of remorseful suspense—days in which he had scarcely prayed, even for her life, save in passionate apostrophes to herself. The time, indeed, had come when

his two lives could no longer exist side by side; he had not yet recognized this, and still tried to rouse into feeling, by means of external acts, the spiritual side of his nature, of whose disquieting torpor he was driven to give himself any explanation rather than the true one.

So now, on leaving Mattie, he sat down, though with a distaste such as he never remembered to have experienced before, to prepare for that evening's work at the location. He had not been there for the last ten days. During the time of Mattie's illness a brother minister, of some other denomination, had compassionately offered to take that part of his work for him; he had done so twice, but now there was no longer any reasonable excuse for trespassing on his kindness. As he sat down to his work, Jesse would have given much to find one. To prepare at all, in any but the

vaguest fashion, was, to tell the truth, a novelty for him ; his words, like his feelings, had been wont to come only too freely on such occasions ; if they wanted something in coherence they lacked nothing of fluency or fervour. In itself, this sudden carefulness was a thing to be commended rather than otherwise ; but it was significant that it should have become necessary : that he felt he dared no longer trust to the inspiration of the circumstances and surroundings. They had no inspiration for him any more. He finished his task in a heaviness of spirit for which he strove in vain to account ; and at the usual hour started for the location.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

When the stars in their courses that night informed him that it was about eight o'clock, Westoby rose up from where he had been lying for some half-hour past, under a mimosa bush on the veld, not far from the track along which Jesse Runciman would pass on his way back from the location. In spite of the stars the night was dark, with the darkness which is only fully realized in the open country. But some twenty years spent principally out of doors, had given Westoby something of the powers of vision of the wild animal or the savage; unless it were for reasons quite unconnected with his

own facilities of sight and motion, it mattered little to him whether a night were light or dark. It was cold, too, very cold ; a thin, keen wind, subtle as the very vapour of ice, swept fitfully across the plain ; but he was as indifferent to cold as he was to darkness. Still, no doubt, it was not the way in which he would, by choice, have spent his evenings, and this was the second during the present week that he had so spent.

He sat up, put out the pipe with which he had been beguiling his watch, and fixed his eyes on the direction where the track was, rather than where it could be seen. In a few minutes, a darker blackness upon the blackness of the night, someone came in sight, walking slowly. Indeed, Runciman was feeling little in haste to get anywhere : there was nothing that could be called a home-coming any more for him. Westoby, strolling down in a slanting direction towards

the track, struck it just a few yards beyond the point to which the younger man had come; then he turned and walked to meet him.

"Oh! is it you?" he said, with sufficiently well-feigned surprise. "I was wondering whether it could be, as I heard that the missus had been sick; but I hope, as you're able to come out, she's getting round again."

Jesse, walking with his eyes on the ground, absorbed in every variety of miserable thought, had not noticed Westoby's approach; now it seemed to him that the last point of his endurance had been reached.

"You villain!" he broke out, with a sort of impotent fury. "If she had died, I—I would have killed you! It would have been you that murdered her, more than me. Why did you ever tell me anything at all?"

Westoby shrugged his shoulders; he had been entirely prepared for this opening.

"Go ahead!" he said. "Have it out, by all means. It don't hurt me. You might, perhaps, remember that if you had taken *my* advice you wouldn't have gone in, and would have saved a row and making a fool of yourself generally—because, I suppose, that's the English of it all?"

His tone was a question, and though he had little need of the answer, he seemed to pause for it. But Jesse had none. It was as impossible to deny that Westoby's exculpation was true in the letter, as it was to doubt that it was false in the spirit. For the rest, it was not likely he was going to make confession to this man. So, at least, he thought; but he did not quite know this man yet.

"Of course," said Westoby, as if answering himself, or the silence. He had

turned again, and was now walking slowly beside Runciman. "You had a row, and likely there was some pretty plain speaking?"

Through the darkness he could yet see Runciman wince, with the instinctive movement of one touched on an open wound.

"So?" he thought; "*her* speaking must have been very plain. I wonder what she said. Maybe you didn't even stop at that?" he continued aloud, still with the same tone of questioning suggestion, the same pause for a reply.

This time it came in the shape of a passionate fragment of protest which was half a sob.

"Well, it was natural enough, I suppose. But," he shook his head almost as it were regretfully, "it was d——d foolish; likely you see that yourself, by now. Ay; I

reckon you'll be in a pretty considerable fix."

Jesse stopped in his walk with a movement of desperation.

"Will you go on and leave me?" he exclaimed, passionately. "I never want to speak to you, or hear you speak again. I wish the day was blotted out that ever I set eyes on you."

Once more Westoby shrugged his shoulders.

"See here," he said, with a not unsympathetic forbearance, "you're a bit riled with yourself—that's as it's bound to be; and I suppose it's only to be expected that you should let some of it off on me. Well! I know what that feels like—maybe I've tried it myself—and I ain't the man to take offence at a little blackguarding from a chap in the kind of quandary you are in."

Jesse made no answer; but neither did he

make any more effort, by remonstrance or by turning aside, to free himself from his companion. The one was useless in the face of Westoby's attitude of injured but cheerfully forgiving innocence; he became aware, almost with bewilderment, that he had not one tangible cause of complaint against him. Twice only had they spoken together on this subject in the course of two months; in each case it had been Jesse himself who introduced it. He grew confused; this colossally looming demon of his mental impressions seemed to be shrinking all at once to very commonplace and human proportions. It was the genie's bottle trick—his collapsing effect over again; but the advantage was not on the side of the weaker party—unhappily here the subtler brain was united with, not severed from, the superiority of strength. He was silent; when Westoby, as if unconsciously, began once more

to walk slowly onwards, he instinctively moved on too. In fact, he had hardly heart or spirit left for any aggressive independent action.

"Ay!" continued Westoby, thoughtfully, "I know just how you'll be feeling, all round."

He spoke the truth. His best friends, any more than his worst enemies, would scarcely have given Westoby credit for being a sympathetic person; and in the true sense of the word he certainly was not. Sympathy of heart he had none. But he had that gift of intellectual sympathy—sympathy of the imagination—which is one mark of the ruler of men. He could so well understand, even where he never had felt nor ever would feel, that he had no need for the dangerous affectation of feeling. Most people, in this matter, take feeling for granted where they find understanding.

"And yet there's a way out," he continued. As he talked, he was turning imperceptibly more and more aside from the track, in a direction away from the township. "I wonder if you have any notion of it?"

"There isn't any way," retorted Jesse, bitterly. "The only way would be to leave off caring, and I should have to die to do that."

"Well," said Westoby, approvingly, "if you could make her fancy that, it might answer—they all go by contraries. But I doubt you couldn't carry it through."

Jesse only made a gesture of mingled impatience and despair.

They had come to one of the numerous undulations in the down-like veld; with the same apparently absent-minded, mechanical action as he had used in reaching it, Westoby now sat down on the slope of the hollow, talking all the while; the other

followed his example, with a more genuine unconsciousness of what he was about.

"You'll have to ride with a light hand for a time," said Westoby. "You must see by now how little is ever to be got by bullying."

"I never did," said Jesse, with a feeble indignation. "That once I was beside myself; who could have helped it? But she never had to complain before."

"Maybe not; but we've got to think how things stand now—not how they might have stood if you hadn't been—— Well! you won't want anyone to be telling you what. To be sure, you were handicapped from the first."

Jesse turned and flung himself, face downwards, on the bare ground.

"It was cruel, wicked!" he broke out. "What had I ever done to deserve all this? I never had done anything; God knows I

never had. Yes; I *have* cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency! I will say it, because it is true. I do well to be angry. Nobody ever started meaning better than I did; and God knows where I have got to now—*I* don't; and all through someone that hates me—that must hate me—that I'm a horror to; how can it be anything else when she thinks I'm no better than—than men I see her shrink from, in all her soul and body, times and times every day? And it's true; I knew it that afternoon—I know now what all sorts of things meant, that I never saw that way before; but was it any fault of mine? what hand have I had in it all, from first to last? Did I ever ask even to be married? any more than I asked to be born? It was cruel, cruel to make—people like me."

"It does seem rather hard lines," said Westoby, assentingly; and, perhaps, in the

abstract, he really thought it was. His own responsibilities in that way did not trouble him at all; for never, on any point, did he allow even the most admirable theory to come into competition for a moment, either with the exigencies or the pleasures of practical life. If he ever denied himself a desire of any kind (and he very frequently did and had done so), it was out of no respect for abstract considerations, however beautiful.

There were a few moments of silence. Westoby sat, absently crumbling up small lumps of the dry soil beside him, letting it dribble through his fingers. Jesse remained as before, revolving bitterness of which all his words could give but a faint impression. Now that this particular difficulty had, for the first time, been really forced upon his notice, he exaggerated it as he did everything; exaggerating Mattie's feelings even more than his own. The mere resumption

of their ordinary habits of life was certain soon to modify, if it could not entirely dispel, this trouble; the probability was that a few weeks hence they would have settled down again into much the same sort of existence as in the first days of their life at Beaconsfield, before the shadow of Gerald Blake had fallen upon either of them. Him Mattie sincerely intended to give up, and in other respects she might be trusted even to make considerable exertions to replace the situation on a tolerable footing. Since live together they must, it was but the plainest common-sense to try to do so as little uncomfortably as might be.

Westoby was quite aware of this, but all that concerned him was to take advantage of the state at once of defiance and of abject passion, in which he found Runciman that night; what the young man might feel a week hence was of little importance.

Once he stood committed, he was in Westoby's power, and might repent in what agonies he pleased; the Baas could very well promise himself that nothing practical should come of his repentance.

Presently Westoby turned his head a little.

"I wonder now," he said, slowly, "what you might be proposing to do?"

Jesse sat up suddenly, facing him almost fiercely.

"I don't care what I do!" he said, with a sort of sullen defiance. "I will bring her back to me somehow, make her forget. If loving won't get her love, I'll buy it; I'll slave for it—there shan't be a lady in the land that shall have every fancy gratified like she shall. I told her so, just now."

"So?" said Westoby, and a little laughter crept into his voice, almost in his own despite. "Upon my word, you have

notions of a sort, after all; you're on the right tack at last, anyhow. You told her so? You'll soon find out it wasn't for nothing, so far as the fancies go; she'll take you at your word—take mine for it. You'll find it a bit expensive, though—more expensive than you think for. How do you make out to do it on your salary?"

Jesse was silent; in fact, it had been but the previous afternoon that an inspection of his affairs, such as he was in the habit of making about quarter-day, had revealed to his rather startled mind how much of his newly-drawn stipend would have to go in paying back bills.

"And, mind you, you'll have to keep your word—or she may find someone who'll keep it for you, and get your wages too. You know best how much start he may have already."

Nobody knew better than Westoby,

who had that day seen the closed doors of the Linone River Company's offices, who knew to within a few pounds the desperate condition of Gerald Blake's finances—what an impossible lie this insinuation contained. But it was one which his hearer was in every way incapable of detecting, and just put the finishing touch which was all that was wanted of it. With a movement of a fury which must wreak itself on some tangible object, Jesse suddenly tore up one of the loose-rooted spiky shrublets beside him; tearing it, as it were, limb from limb:

"If she asks for all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and if I have to sell my soul to get them, she shall have them!" he exclaimed, with a passion which was quiet through sheer breathlessness. "And when God asks me: 'What is this that thou hast done?' I shall say: 'This is what the woman whom Thou gavest to be with

me has brought me to.'" He paused; Westoby knew better than to take any notice of the extravagant form of a protest of which he shrewdly suspected the speaker himself was half frightened already. Probably it added just a little to his contempt for the man whose fundamental weakness was in no way more unmistakably betrayed than in the useless vehemence of his expressions.

"Well," he said, after a moment, and he made his tone studiously matter-of-fact and business-like; "you can't have been on the Fields, even so long as three months, without knowing the quickest and easiest way of making your pile here. If you're willing to take it, I'm willing to put you into the way of it, so as there ain't many as could, or would do. But, of course, I'm not going to do it for nothing; I'm not telling you so—why should I?—of course, I know that cock wouldn't

fight. If I help you, it's that you may help me; you'll have to work for me and under me, but I can promise to make it worth your while. You know what I mean; you may take it or leave it. Yes, or no?"

The space of hesitation was scarcely perceptible; some there probably was, but the young man was now at once too reckless in spirit and too much heated in his imagination, to be capable of practical reflection. If any fault was to be found with the proposal, it seemed rather, just then, that illicit diamond-buying was too material and common-place a transgression quite to come up to the demands of the situation.

He flung the wrecked dismembered fragments of the plant he had torn up far off into the veld, with a gesture as if he flung away all scruples, all attempt at further resistance, with it.

"Yes, then," he replied, "I'll do anything; I said so."

He spoke with a sort of doggedness, which Westoby never for a moment mistook for strength of purpose. So far from it that, for a moment, a perfect rage of impatience came over him; he could have found it in his heart to get up and walk away, to break off the whole transaction irrevocably, then and there, so intense was his realization of the burden and weariness of the task which he was about to undertake. But he restrained himself.

"I reckon, then," he said, as before, "that we understand each other. I give you so much per carat commission on all the stuff you buy for me—we can settle the exact terms another day. I'm quite ready to do the straight thing by you; no one has ever had to find fault with me on that score. So much for my part. For you—

you must work only under my orders ; buy from nobody except such parties as I bid you, not if they should offer you a second Koh-i-noor, not even if you want to buy on your own account. Mind that ; it's for your own good as much as mine ; you'd be trapped before you knew where you were, else. You needn't be afraid we shan't do enough business to make it pay ; I'll back my connection in niggers against any in the four Camps. I've been the best part of twenty years getting it together, and it's a pity if I don't get some good out of it at last. It's large, and—what's a deal more to the purpose—it's safe ; and, whatever *I* might be, *you'll* never be safe for a minute working outside it. That is the very first thing of all. Do you understand ?"

And now the voice was the voice of the master, such as Westoby knew how to make it.

"Yes," said Jesse.

"Well! then, what is your next night for going to the location?"

"Thursday."

He was speaking now with a sullenness which was more than half fright. He had not, indeed, so soon arrived at the point of actually wishing to back out of his agreement; he had arrived at a dim perception of the appalling difficulty he would find in doing so, if he did wish it. It was just this that Westoby was most anxious to impress upon him, for, so far as he was concerned, the next forty-eight hours would be the most dangerous of the situation—the hours in which Runciman would know more than was good for any outsider, and yet would not have compromised himself beyond hope of return. Violence, in Jesse's present condition, would have been useless; he was, for the time, armed against terror by sheer

desperation. Westoby could only trust to the paralyzing powers of the mere assumption of an irresistible will. It seemed likely to be effectual.

He sat silent, considering a little, after Runciman's last answer. Then he said:

"Thursday, at the same hour?"

"Yes."

"Well, I think I had better have another talk with you before then; I shall want time to arrange things. Let's see—you go to Dreyer's place sometimes, don't you?"

"Oh, yes; I go there," said Jesse, bitterly enough. The little laugh with which he said it would have been tears in a less exceptional mood; now the revelation seemed quite of a piece with all the rest of the injustice, the merciless irony of Heaven.

It was not much of a revelation to him,

after all. The days were long past in which even Jesse could persuade himself that Dreyer was ever likely to be a satisfactory convert; yet he had kept up with him, partly because the canteen-keeper's bearing towards himself was, on the whole, flattering; partly because, after the flourish of trumpets there had been in certain circles over the event, he was unwilling to own publicily that he had altogether failed. So he had continued his visits at intervals, gave good advice, with an ever-diminishing faith in its efficacy, and scarcely troubled Dreyer to reply in terms in the sincerity of which he had no more faith at all, even though the canteen-keeper had made some real sacrifice of his natural habits and manners, with a view to keeping up the character before the public. It is true, he would probably have resumed these openly long since, but Westoby was inexorable now

in obliging him to preserve appearances as far as possible.

"All right," said Westoby; "then be there at five o'clock on Thursday afternoon; you will find me. Most likely you won't see much of me, after that; perhaps you may guess I'm not thought to be very good company, and as I reckon nobody could be made to think there was any chance of your having converted *me*, it's best they shouldn't see us on terms at all. Above all, never you come to my place, whatever happens. If it should chance that you must see me, or I you, we must manage it some other way. But if you only stick to orders, it ought to be all plain sailing enough."

He rose up from his place.

"I'll be off now," he said. "You stay here a bit—ten minutes, say—and then go home. You remember, and understand?"

"Yes," said Jesse, but it was as in a dream.

"Good-night, then," said Westoby, and strolled away across the veld towards Kimberley. In a moment the darkness had swallowed him.

Jesse Runciman sat on obediently; in the growing confusion of his mind, obedience seemed the one anchor left; deep down in his soul was a sort of relief—the reverse side of a great suspense—to feel that so far it was an innocent obedience. He tried to benumb his every power of thought and feeling, and nature itself helped him, numbing both with the exhaustion of a great reaction. The chill of this exhaustion added its own insidious deathliness to that of the cold without; he shivered, now, as he sat, yet felt suddenly too weary even to wish to move before he need.

The silence that seemed natural to the

hour and place was rent continually by the clamorous barking, now near, now far, challenging, responsive, of innumerable dogs; by a kind of tom-tom performance on empty paraffin tins, proceeding with maddening monotony from the location. He did not heed it; his nerves were too much deadened even to be sensible of irritation.

He sat there in a great momentary vacuous peace; his soft sad eyes staring blankly before him at the spangled sky. A falling star slid from its place, gleamed, and passed into nothingness. A moment later, with a little vacant sigh, he, too, slowly rose and passed.

END OF VOL. II.

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